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ETHICS AND RELIGION

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A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY SIR JOHN SEELEY,
DR. FELIX ADLER, MR. W. M. SALTER, PROF.
HENRY SIDGWICK, PROF. G. VON GIŻYCKI,
DR. BERNARD BOSANQUET, MR. LESLIE
STEPHEN, DR. STANTON COIT,
AND PROF. J. H. MUIRHEAD

EDITED BY
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PREFACE

THE criticism most frequently brought against Ethical Societies is that they do not rest upon any philosophical basis. The implication is that they have therefore no foundation in thought at all.

The writers of the essays in this volume, all of whom have been founders or influential friends of Ethical Societies, are unanimously insistent upon one point. They urge that an Ethical Society should hold itself uncommitted to any theory of the universe, and should not be primarily interested in the metaphysic of Ethics; they hold that its relation to theory should be that of investigation and construction rather than of advocacy and dogmatic inculcation. Sir John Seeley warns us not to descend from theory to practice, but to mount from moral experience and effort to universal truths. Professor Sidgwick advises us to avoid the ultimate principles of thought, and to keep to the fruitful region of middle axioms. Dr. Bosanquet expresses the same view, when he refuses to accept the spreading of *ideas about morality* as a function of an

Ethical Society, but, instead, recommends the spreading of *moral ideas*. Dr. Felix Adler, Mr. Salter, Prof. Von Giżycki, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Dr. Coit, and Prof. Muirhead, all dwell upon this same distinction. That this distinction may be preserved and made familiar to a wider public is the chief object of the Society of Ethical Propagandists in issuing this volume.

The public—especially that portion of it which is theologically or metaphysically inclined—is liable to mistake the absence of philosophical theory for a lack of philosophic insight, among the members of a union for spreading moral ideas. But it may be a very proof and token of their philosophic discipline and habit, and of their familiarity with the growth of metaphysical systems, that they are willing to ascend from experience and practice to theory, and that they possibly expect to end, but certainly entertain no hope of beginning, with a system of universal truth.

The majority of these essays were written ten years ago; they then gave character and direction to the Ethical Movement. But, as new leaders enter and the older retire, it is important that the thoughts of the founders should be preserved. It was inevitable also that sooner or later some one, interested in the Ethical Movement, should collect these essays; since some of them are no longer easily accessible, and since their remarkable unity and their striking reinforcement of one another cannot be fully appreciated, except when they are read together.

The volume, however, will prove of equal interest to those not concerned with Ethical Societies. To them the main theme of the book will be the relation of "Ethics and Religion," and hence the book has been so named, after the title given by Sir John Seeley to his essay.

The thanks of the Society of Ethical Propagandists are due to Lady Seeley, and to the Editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, to Dr. Felix Adler, Mr. W. M. Salter, Prof. Henry Sidgwick, Dr. Bernard Bosanquet, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Dr. Coit, Prof. Muirhead, and to Messrs. Swan Sonnenschein & Co. for permission to reprint.

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ETHICS AND RELIGION[1]

J. R. SEELEY

I ADDRESS this Society, as it were, from outside, for I have had no share in founding it, I meet it now for the first time, and I suppose I am not even a member of it. I am here simply in compliance with your wish, to give advice and offer suggestions, and I feel that my independent position is a position of advantage. I am in no way pledged to you nor you to me. I may speak without restraint and you may listen at your ease. If you like my views and suggestions, so much the better, and if you do not, why, no harm is done.

English people have an irrepressible habit of forming societies. And no doubt much may be done by association, but it has struck me at times that we conclude somewhat too readily, as soon as we become aware of some public object worthy to be pursued, that a society must be formed to pursue it. And I have known many societies which have shown great enthusiasm so long as the process of organising themselves and recruiting members continued, but when this was complete and they were confronted with the question what precisely they were to do, have begun to betray embarrassment. An awkward pause follows, one or two meetings are held, speeches are made in which the great importance of the object in view is convincingly shown, but the appropriateness of the means adopted, viz., a society, is not proved but only taken for granted. Soon afterwards lethargy sets in, and in the end the society is quietly wound up, every member, however, protesting that there has been after all no waste of time and trouble, that a single wave may recede but the tide comes in, and so on! Will such be the lot of *your* Society?

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[1] An Address delivered before the Ethical Society of Cambridge.

It seems to me that you are really exposed to this danger, that while you feel deeply the value of ethical principles, while you are convinced perhaps that the very salvation of the world depends upon the due promulgation of them, you may omit to consider sufficiently what precise function an Ethical Society can fulfil in this work of promulgation, which could not be equally well fulfilled by machinery already existing or without machinery at all. For certainly it does not follow because an object is all-important, because an idea possesses our minds, that a new society ought to be called into existence. Some time ago there was sent to me a prospectus of a proposed "Roger Ascham Society." It consisted mainly of a long essay on the Life and Genius of Roger Ascham, showing how great both were. In the last paragraph the conclusion was drawn very briefly and peremptorily that a "Roger Ascham Society" ought accordingly to be founded, and in the closing sentences of the prospectus it was stated that "the objects of such a society were as yet undetermined." You will not, I am sure, proceed in this way. You begin, I am sure, with a more definite scheme, but there may still be a danger that you may contemplate a course of action which will lead to results somewhat insignificant, hardly worth the trouble.

You might, of course, simply form a society of students for the purpose of investigating the theory of morals. But I need not pause on this, because it is plain that you do not intend it. You address the public, you lecture, you preach, you institute a propaganda. Very well, then. Have you a common doctrine? Are you agreed on your principles? Or do you expect gradually to arrive at a common doctrine, which it will then become the business of the society to propagate? If so, I should like you to consider how much is involved in this. It means that the Ethical Society would resolve itself into an organised school, a new sect or Church. After all, every Church on earth, and certainly the Christian Church, is an ethical society. It will be difficult to found a new ethical society such as I have described without entering into rivalry with existing Churches. If you take pains to avoid this by maintaining silence upon disputed points, you will run the risk of reducing yourselves to insignificance; if you face the difficulty you will stand forth before the world as a new sect. You will either found a new schism within the Christian Church, or you will organise a new attack upon it from without. To found a new Church, even if it is destined to become a dominating Church, is certainly a serious thing; and if it is destined, like so many new Churches that we have seen, to be only an ambitious failure, then, I ask, is the founding of it worth while? Carried out with vigour and rigour such a scheme might possibly produce great results, but in my opinion, for reasons I shall give later, they would be partly mischievous results. On the other hand, if careful circumspection and moderation were used, I can conceive that it might be both successful and useful, but think it more likely that moderation would ruin the enterprise by making it insipid and insignificant.

I point out these difficulties at the outset. They may seem serious, but if I had thought them insurmountable, if I had considered that the Ethical Society, like the Roger Ascham Society, was produced by a mere instinctive spasm of good-intentions rather than by a reasonable adaptation of means to ends, I should not, you may be sure, have accepted your invitation; I should not deliver this address. I accepted with pleasure, for this reason, that I see an immense want, an immense opportunity. I see a great current flowing among us, new movements daily commencing, which take the same direction and are produced by the same cause. This seems to me to be one of these movements, but perhaps not entirely conscious. I would gladly say something which may make the members of this Society more fully conscious of their own motives and purposes, and may dispose them to put themselves within the full sway of that mighty current, which is capable of carrying them very far. The poet's advice to those who would deal with public interests is, "Watch what main currents draw the years." Let me call your attention to one of those main currents.

It is not you alone, the students of ethical science, who desire that an ethical movement should be commenced. This is not the mere private conception of a few thinkers who have a special point of view. There may be a stirring among these specialists, caused partly by special causes ; but if so, the scientific movement answers to another and far vaster tendency, which has long been gathering force in the general public of educated men. The general movement of reform which in the last half century has altered the country, both politically and socially, had from the outset a certain ethical tinge. The practical side of it may have been more prominent, but it had always an ethical side; and this comes more into view as obvious evils are swept away and the turn comes for reforms of a more difficult and refined order. But another great cause is at work, the special characteristic of our age, the fact that unusual moral earnestness is combined with an unprecedented perplexity and uncertainty, that the old recognised organs of spiritual life are in a great degree paralysed at the very moment when spiritual life itself is most active. I do not know in what degree this Ethical Society may have consciously sprung out of the feeling so widely prevalent, that existing Churches and existing forms of Christianity are not equal to the burden which the age imposes on them in respect of moral teaching. For all I know, those who took the lead in the movement may have had no such thought in their minds. But the importance of the movement seems to me to lie in this fact, which therefore we ought especially to weigh, that you offer an ethical supply at the moment of an exceptional ethical famine. Whether you will come in aid of the Christian Church, or whether you will try to push it on one side, is a question you will have to consider. In any case what makes your enterprise interesting is, that practically you must place yourselves on the ground which has been so long occupied by the Christian Church.

You will say that I have referred twice to the Church, and that the first time I treated it as an obstacle likely to defeat your plan, whereas now I speak of it as furnishing you with an opportunity and a hope of success. True; because you may regard ethics in two different ways, either theoretically or practically. Or rather, I should say, you may give the preponderance to theory or to practice, for no doubt if you confine yourselves absolutely to theory you will disarm opposition; but this, I fancy, you have never dreamed of doing. If you set out with theory, but add to theory an active propaganda, you will find, as I said, an obstacle in the Church, which in my opinion will either defeat or pervert and vitiate your enterprise. But a third course is open to you. You may set out, not with theory, but with practice, and you may use theory as an instrument just so far as you feel the need of it. Instead of descending from the heights of abstract science to the practical needs of mankind, you may ascend from these practical needs to those heights in search of a remedy. Between these two courses there is the greatest possible difference, and the latter seems to me as hopeful as the former seems dangerous and difficult. On the latter course I do not think you need fear, if you proceed with discretion, the opposition of the Church; rather you may find, in the needs of the Church and from the difficulties with which the Church now contends, your main dependence and prospect of success.

Are your minds filled with ideas and reasonings about the basis of morality or the method of moral science; about the categorical imperative, or hedonism, or utilitarianism, or the influence of heredity upon our moral notions, or the connection of moral science with physiology; and by long dwelling upon these views have you come to desire to impart them, from a vague notion that thoughts which have been beneficial to yourselves might be so equally to others? This is what I call descending from theory to practice. On the other hand, are your minds occupied with the state of society around us, and have you become convinced that mere reforms of arrangement, institutions, or machinery will not reach the root of the evils that prevail; are you alarmed by the spectacle of the public blindness and bewilderment amid events and changes so portentous, and have you convinced yourselves that the only safety for the nation lies in a firmer grasp of principles, first principles, ethical principles, on the part, not of a few persons here and there, but of the people itself? This, then, is what I call ascending from practice to theory.

I myself do not think, I say it candidly, that very much good would result from merely promulgating academic and systematic views on the subject of ethics. Theoretical ethics, it seems to me, attract very few minds, though nothing is so universally or intensely interesting as practical ethics. "It was a mere moral essay." That is the phrase we use when we want to say that a discourse was wholly uninteresting. And therefore if you simply arrange a scheme of popular lectures on theoretical ethics I tell you that one of two things will happen. Either the lectures will fall flat and excite no interest whatever, or you will find yourselves driven to make them controversial. No doubt by vigorously attacking accepted beliefs you may excite interest. I dare say there are among you some who are strongly impressed by the defects of the Christianity which is popularly taught; there may be some, for aught I know, who reject Christianity itself in whatever form it may be taught. These, then, will be able to make their lectures interesting, while the less combative spirits will fail; the heterodox lecturers will win an audience, while the orthodox will not. And so, as I said, if you set out from theory you will either simply fail, or you will end by creating a new dissenting sect.

If we set out from theory we easily persuade ourselves that it is a most virtuous action to attack with outspoken, fearless frankness what we believe to be error; and I certainly admit that in the popular Christianity of Church and Chapel there is more than enough of error, and mischievous error. But if we take a practical view, if we start rather with a keen sense of the public needs than with a strong logical grasp of abstract truth, I think we shall arrive at a very different conclusion. It does seem to me that those who fully realise the dangers of the time, who mark the wildness that prevails, the recklessness of anarchy, the savageness of pessimism, that are appearing as the results of an age which sets all minds, even the rudest, thinking on all subjects, even the most delicate, which demands the most resolute action while at the same time it shakes all the principles by which action might be guided; those who mark this, I think, will feel that it is no time for sophistical wit-combats, but for the greatest possible union and co-operation among serious men of all schools.

I lay it down then that your Ethical Society should be above all things practical and in the least possible degree controversial; that it should assert ethical principles, as such, against unethical principles,—that is, against anarchy and confusion—rather than one set of ethical principles against another.

Never, surely, was the English mind so confused, so wanting in fixed moral principles, as at present. I have referred to religious scepticism; and you may have objected in your minds that there was scepticism enough among us in the eighteenth century, when Bishop Butler humbly ventured to submit that after all something might be urged in favour of Christianity. But, not to urge that perhaps the scepticism of that time did not penetrate very deep into the mass of English society, there were other principles, which may be called ethical, very firmly rooted in the English mind of that time, a solid old English discipline, a narrow but effective code of duty, a rule of life which was scarcely called in question. Church and State alike were still irresistibly strong. We obeyed the law and enforced the law; we venerated our old constitution; we stood together as one man. We formed, as lively stones, a great building, a house not made with hands, and which no human hands, not even those of Napoleon, could destroy. The scepticism which undermines and enfeebles us now is partly indeed, but only partly, a scepticism about religion. It extends to everything else. We have misgivings about morality; we suspect law itself to be a pedant, government to be a tyrant, patriotism to be an antiquated prejudice, justice and honesty to be Philistine virtues. As to that old English constitution, we have almost reformed it away. That great struggle which our grandfathers maintained against the world in arms, we are half ashamed of; and if there is anything which we are now instinctively disposed to regard as probably true, when we have lost our faith in everything else, it is some form of that revolutionary Jacobinism which our grandfathers so obstinately withstood. And the old national character seems to have disappeared with the old principles. Instead of a massive strength approaching to brutality, a strong individuality which looked almost like madness, a masculine grasp of reality, a cool contempt for sentimentalism and fine phrases, we seem to have acquired all the contrary qualities—loquacity, sentimentalism, helpless confusion and inaccuracy of thought, hysterical weakness, and the habit of thinking in crowds.

I am concerned here with this change only so far as it is bad. What may be said in favour of it of course we all know. We have gained vastly in breadth of view, intelligence, and refinement. Probably what we threw aside could not be retained; what we adopted was forced upon us by the age. Nevertheless, we had formerly what I may call a national discipline, which formed a firm, strongly-marked national character. We have now only materials, which may be of the first quality, but have not been worked up. We have everything except decided views and steadfast purpose—everything in short except character! We have emotions, sentiment, thought, knowledge in abundance, only not character! And so to foreigners this nation seems degenerate—a nation in decay; and if we look at the individual Englishman, can we say that we see there the manly and kingly Englishman of former times? Is it the English type which now commands the admiration of the world? Does the Englishman, say in his parliamentary utterances, invariably speak the truth? Is there freshness and sincerity in his moral views? Does he shun conventionality? Is he free from vulgarity?

This is the evil with which we have to deal. We have before us a problem eminently of practical, not of theoretical, ethics. Scepticism in a certain sense is the disease; that is, there is a reign of uncertainty, bewilderment, want of fixed opinion. But it is scarcely scepticism in the more theological sense. What we want is not a new set of philosophic dogmas. The decline of religious belief is a part of the evil, but in my opinion only a part, for what we have to deal with is a decline of all belief, in other words, a want of grasp, a want of any convictions strong enough to produce resolute action.

Not a theological creed merely, but the whole creed necessary for life and character has crumbled away and needs to be replaced. This is the immense opportunity I spoke of. For I know no way in which a nation can acquire clear and courageous views, so as to become capable of playing a manly part in the world, except by the influence of the clearer and stronger minds upon the rest. In every generation some men see their way even when the multitude is most bewildered, some men can grasp principles even when the most are without pole-star or compass. These men must influence the rest; and the utmost that can be tried in such an extremity is to bring to bear upon the mass the greatest amount and the best quality of influence from the better gifted and the better informed.

In general it seems to me a primary condition of national health that there shall be free and abundant contact between the most advanced culture and the masses, that due pains shall be taken "to marshal well the ranks behind," and keep the whole army together. Where there is a great residuum of ignorance and stupidity, everything is dragged down. In such a country you see Lord George Gordon riots, or a plebiscite for Louis Napoleon, and the nation disgraces itself. In such a country all the best thinkers are discouraged and waste their lives. Bad books push out good ones, and truth is a voice crying in the wilderness. But if ever this contact was needful it is now and here; for evidently what has put the finishing touch to our confusion is the fact that the residuum of ignorance and stupidity has become our master and our judge. If in politics we have seen honesty almost openly renounced, it is because our masters do not know the difference between truth and falsehood; if morality and public duty, along with veracity and modesty, seem suddenly to have become obsolete, it is because our masters know nothing of any public interest or any high tradition. Just when the religious tradition had been dethroned by scepticism, and the constitutional tradition by radicalism, a new sovereign was crowned who knew nothing of either. Ignorance was proclaimed king, and an authority set up,

> "Before whose fell approach and secret might
> Art after art goes out, and all is night!"

Here again I am concerned only with the darker side of things. I suppose it is needless to protest that I see the other side. I am no alarmist; I hold that all may yet be well if a sufficient effort is made, if we keep ourselves well on the alert. If time is given, if we are not overwhelmed at once, this illiterate sovereign, who after all is well-intentioned, may be taught something, and may be induced to hear advice.

But a greater missionary effort is needed than was ever needed before, a much greater effort than we have hitherto thought necessary. How shallow is that saying which was thought so smart, "that our masters must be taught to read and write." To read and write! will that enable them to govern the British Empire? Nay, they must learn something more difficult; they must acquire a habit of dealing with large questions, true views of government, but especially they must acquire a new sense of duty, first principles, *ethical* principles.

These things cannot be taught by school boards. It is not education in the ordinary sense that is needed, it is some equivalent for that atmosphere of thought, ideas, recognised truth, which surrounds *us*, and forms a second education for our mature life, but which does not surround the great mass of the community. There is a gap, there is a wheel wanting in our machinery of culture. We have an apparatus for the discovery and testing of truth and an apparatus for communicating it to a certain small part of the people, but no apparatus for spreading it everywhere. The great multitude actually never come within hearing of the most necessary truths. On the most momentous questions they are left to grope in the dark; no instruction is within their reach; if they err egregiously it is not from perversity, but mainly because no competent person has ever taken the trouble to contradict them or to inform them better. If your Ethical Society stood by itself I should not expect it to be in any way capable of dealing with such an enormous evil. But your movement, as I have said, is only one among many that have taken the same direction, and the sum total of the force thus set in motion, if it is applied to the best advantage, may produce great results. Societies precisely like yours are springing up in all parts of the country; the very word "ethical" has been brought to us from America by our energetic friend Dr. Stanton Coit, who has in the main the same object as yourselves, and yet is quite independent of you. But the movements I have most in view are those which have emanated from the universities,—the Extension Movement, Toynbee Hall, and many similar enterprises. The spontaneous growth and the multitudinousness of these are a very hopeful fact, and I trust they may keep their independence of each other. But it seems to me that the Ethical Society might do something towards uniting them and holding them in brotherly communion. For after all the word " ethical " has for the first time gone to the root of the matter. Some of these societies have called themselves educational, or political, or what not; but, regarded as a whole, the movement is an effort to raise the whole nation at once to a higher moral level; that is, it is ethical.

Not only do these movements testify to a great demand and to a great effort, but we have the prospect of being able to avail ourselves of two great instruments, two levers of immense power. One of these is the Universities, the influence of which already spreads everywhere, is visibly growing, and is likely to become tenfold greater than it is. Here are the natural headquarters of a movement like this; here are the ablest young men, living in an atmosphere which, comparatively at least, may be called unworldly, and meditating the part they are to play in life. Here it has been for centuries the custom that a large number annually dedicate themselves to the Christian priesthood. Here, therefore, a movement like this is naturally at home. And we have seen already that at the universities more than elsewhere the impulse is felt. Wave after wave swells there and moves out, until the whole country feels in a degree unknown to former times the influence and the presence of Cambridge and Oxford. And not only in the universities does this take place, but the universities themselves almost officially sanction and favour the movement. I am glad that the ancient universities have thus taken the lead ; but new institutions on a smaller scale, which have the same character and spirit, are budding everywhere under the name sometimes of universities, sometimes of colleges. The movement I speak of, which on this occasion at least I may call the Ethical Movement, will certainly find a focus in every one of these. The first great lever, then, is the universities. What is the second ? The second is the Christian Church itself, which has been for nearly two thousand years the great Ethical Society of the world. For if the universities spread their influence widely, the Church is actually everywhere, not only in every great town, but in every village, and everywhere its influence is established and of old standing. And already in these movements the Church—I mean, of course, the Church and the Nonconformist sects together—has taken a good share directly, and a still greater indirectly. Such movements, indeed, can scarcely prosper except where Christianity has prepared the way ; such things only grow out of a soil which has been formed by centuries of Christian tillage.

But the very fact that you found new ethical societies is a proof that you do not intend simply to repeat what clergymen and dissenting ministers have been preaching so long. I dare say many of your members are orthodox Christians, but I think we must all alike hold that the Christian teaching of the present day is insufficient, exceedingly insufficient. You found ethical societies because you consider that so large a part of practical morality is either forgotten or only treated perfunctorily in church or chapel, that the Christianity of the day may almost be said to teach religion perhaps, but not ethics. I am not one of those who underrate those great lessons of self-sacrifice and brotherhood which, as I have just said, form the basis of all our schemes of improvement; it is in the practical application of them to the present form of society that we think so much is wanting. I think we must all feel this, but probably we feel it in different ways, according to the different points of view from which we have observed the world. I will give one or two examples which have struck myself, not because they are the best, but because what I have said about the difference between the practical and the theoretical view of ethics will not be clear without examples.

I will speak, then, first of education, which we must all feel ought to be governed by ethical principles.

Certainly I do not say that this subject has been neglected by the religious bodies, nor do I at this moment complain of the religious party spirit which has turned the province of education into a battlefield between them. But when the clergy have contended that education should be religious, and that the Bible should be protected in its sacred position, we may ask, Is that all? Can nothing else be said on the subject? I imagine the Ethical Society will treat this subject with quite another sort of thoroughness. There must be principles to be laid down, principles mainly ethical, for every stage and every kind of education. You will not lay them down dogmatically, for that is not your method, but you will bring them into clear view, examine rival methods, and perhaps elicit at last, on some points at least, an agreement which, being deliberate, will be authoritative. The essential point is to give body and substance to the vague floating impressions as to what education ought to be. A society may do this, but till it is done, that is, till the ethical view of education takes a fixed shape and acquires weight and authority, we must continue to have what I may call the present unethical education. We talk of religious and secular systems, but this other distinction of ethical and unethical is at least of equal importance. What do I mean by unethical education?

It is that deplorable practical compromise to which, as so often in England, we are driven by the effect of mere bewilderment and confusion. We see, of course, that good education is of the utmost importance, but no one seems to know what it is, and we are very busy! Accordingly we cease to think of what we should like, and put up with what we can get. Ethical considerations fall into abeyance and practical business considerations take their place. There are examinations to be passed, appointments, scholarships, or fellowships to be won. It is a view which commends itself by its simplicity, that the object of education is to pass examinations with success, and that this object determines the method. I call this the unethical view. I think it will be one great function of your Society to confront it with a worthier view, and to persevere until you make the worthier view seem practical, and to support it with the votes of a united party. The movement has already commenced; by the help of perseverance it will succeed, and the next generation will hear with astonishment that a nation calling itself great, a nation professing to march in the van, can have had ideas so vulgar.

I pass to another subject equally important, and ask what an Ethical Society will have to say to politics. As the ethical spirit is expelled from education by the prize-system, so it is expelled from political life by the party-system. In both cases it makes the same sort of ineffectual struggle. We mean well by our country, as we mean well by our children. Theoretically we should be shocked at the very idea of sacrificing our country to the pleasure of a caucus, as of sacrificing our children to the grinding influence of examinations. But the party-system holds the field. An ethical view of politics is at present a sort of Utopia. It is only the fond dream of an individual here and there, and as such can have no practical effect. We grow tired of mere child's play ; gradually we persuade ourselves that it is our duty to make our action as effective as possible, and we seem to see that no political action can be effective which does not conform to the rules of party. Moreover our vague ethical notions, which we try to hold in the face of universal opposition, gradually melt away for want of support, and sometimes we suspect that they are not even harmless, that by introducing confusion they are positively mischievous. And then we are very busy! Here again what is needed is to give body and substance to floating notions. Let us suppose that a large body of cultivated and influential men, acting together, made it their business to disentangle the whole web of falsehood and fallacy which has been woven by the parties. They would not only do an immense service to public opinion, which now lies helpless within its meshes, and especially to those newly enfranchised whose untrained minds are utterly incapable of withstanding such sophistry, but they would make an ethical view of politics for the first time possible. In proportion as party was discredited the country would come into view. Our minds would be set free to study its true interest, to understand its true history; there might be a lull in the interminable scurrilous brawl which debauches the national mind; and in such a lull ethical considerations might be heard, and so a purer political school might be founded.

I am obliged to treat this subject very briefly, partly because I cannot hope to treat so great a subject adequately, partly because I do not know how far I may expect to carry you with me. Till lately Englishmen have profoundly believed in the party system, and though recent events have given a rude shock to that traditional faith, I do not suppose many are even now prepared to go so far as I do in condemning it. But I think an Ethical Society, which certainly does not intend to remain timidly silent or to utter only commonplaces on political subjects, cannot fail to take in general this view of parties, cannot fail to see that however necessary within strict limits party organisation may be, the party view and the ethical view of politics are mutually exclusive, and neither can triumph but by the defeat of the other.

But my principal object in referring to these two subjects, education and politics, has been to show how vast a field is open to an Ethical Society. How wide are these questions, how evidently do they come within the domain of ethics, and yet how seldom are they treated from the ethical point of view! Imagine education liberated from the yoke of business, and politics liberated from the yoke of party ; is not this a short formula for the moral regeneration of the country?

And yet other questions are not less great, and are even more obvious, and perhaps you may think more urgent. There is the enormous social question, the whole question of poverty and riches. Here too what we want is a fixed ethical view. Here too we have had a reign of mere business—it is the English propensity to turn everything into *business*—until evils have arisen which have provoked a strong counter-current of sentimentalism. We can only escape from such wild eddies of opinion by acquiring a connected view, and you point to the only way in which this can be done. In one word, a number of people sufficiently large must give attention to the subject for a sufficient length of time, and in a spirit at once sufficiently practical and sufficiently theoretical. Wed thought with action, and wed concentration with co-operation, and you may grapple even with difficulties as great as these.

I have said that the Christianity of the day scarcely deals with many of these questions. Yet if you had a certain amount of success in dealing with them, sooner or later Christianity would feel that, as the great ethical teacher of mankind, it must deal with them too. It is for this reason that I think it all-important for you to decide what attitude towards the Churches you will assume. Will you elect to be doctrinaires? No doubt if you choose to regard the doctrines of theology as a kind of philosophical system, some of you may reject this system, and these may come to fancy themselves bound in the name of truth and scientific thoroughness to attack it until it is overthrown and a truer system established in its place. More probably still they will adopt a sort of middle course, so that their ethical lectures will enter into a sort of covert rivalry with the teaching of the Church, and your Society will be to Christianity as a whole what Nonconformity is to the Anglican Church.

My advice is that instead of waging war, open or covert, you enter once for all into the heartiest and most unreserved alliance with Christianity. Of course, I am speaking to those members of the Society who may be heterodox, for at present I am happy to think many of you *are* sincere Christians, and therefore can no more be allies than they can be enemies of Christianity. But I hope this Society will not make the mistake which the Church itself has so often made, and become a sect of dogmatists instead of a vital organ of ethical life and ethical reform. Such exclusiveness may no doubt be proper in the schools, but in practical co-operative work it seems to me so wholly out of place that the very tendency to it ought to be resolutely checked.

Is it your object to rouse ethical life among the people? I say then that attacks on Christianity, whatever else they may do, can only have the effect of paralysing ethical life. It might be otherwise if by waving a wand you could cause Christianity to disappear and some new and powerful ethical system to take its place. As it is, by meeting with a formal negation all that the established teachers of ethics affirm you neutralise their influence; and as, in any case, many years or centuries must pass before an authority so ancient as that of Christianity can be subverted or another set up, you condemn the people during those years or centuries to have no ethical rule of life at all. And it seems to me that much of the confusion we already witness, much of the unrestrained folly and frenzy which fill us with dismay, is the effect of this conflict of authorities. The ancient authority affirms and forthwith the modern authority denies. Do you regard the public as an intelligent judge, calmly deciding between the disputants? Is it not rather a bewildered listener, whom the uncertainty reduces to despair?

But if you do not elect to be doctrinaires, what will you elect to be? I do think that in England we are too familiar with co-operative work to dream that there is anything dishonest in the forbearances and the reticences that are imposed by it. In this very movement you have already proceeded far enough along the road of mutual forbearance to have grown accustomed and attached to it. Orthodox and heterodox persons, zealous clergymen and persons who have not a Christian dogma left, have worked amicably together hitherto. They do not conceal their opinions, much less betray them; but they feel that they have a common object which must not needlessly be sacrificed. They resolve therefore to keep company until the time shall come when they are forced to separate, and they find, perhaps to their surprise, that this time never comes.

I have said that the Christian teaching of the day seems to me ethically very insufficient. It is drawn too exclusively from an ancient text-book. But I can never be brought to see that any Christian dogma is responsible for this insufficiency, and I think that, without giving up any dogma, the Churches might go heart and soul into this ethical movement. I for my part am not dissatisfied in the main with what the Churches teach, but with what they do *not* teach. The kind of ethical reform I desire to see is one which Christianity itself might have initiated. It is now undertaken independently of the Churches, but, I believe, without the faintest impulse of hostility or jealousy towards the Churches. It is my opinion that only by a friendly and hearty alliance can you achieve any great success. By means of it opposition will be disarmed, and your influence will have a passport into every nook and corner of the community. Meanwhile both parties to the alliance will be morally improved by it. The Churches may acquire a certain freshness of tone by association with a more independent body of teachers. The many strong thinkers, who in the present state of opinion cannot be clergymen, may thus from an independent position give help and advice to the clergy, and they may contribute to make Christian teaching ethically more practical and powerful, more masculine, less conventionally solemn and pathetic. But the Churches, it is my opinion, have quite as much to give as to take—to teach as to learn. After all, Christianity is the original Ethical Society. It has the ancient tradition and store of precedents, it has the ubiquitous organisation, it has the unapproachable classical literature, it has the long line of prophets and saints. We are all morally its children, and most of us are not even its grown-up children. I say, let us not be guilty of presumption. It is a pity that in a Christian country it should be necessary to found ethical societies at all; it would be arrogant, and at the same time it would be suicidal, for these societies to hold themselves aloof from the Christianity of the country. Rather let the new influence blend freely with and even be prepared to lose itself in the old. Let the new teachers assist the old; let the new and old clergy be indistinguishable. I am in favour of what some have called compromise. Surely we moderns do not believe much in cataclysms. Development is our word. The present grows out of the past. The most vital, the most influential ethical teaching of the present day ought to grow out of Christianity; and thus it seems to me that if in this Society some are orthodox and others are heterodox — even in an extreme degree—they may not only work together, but may even adopt, if in somewhat different senses, the same sacred motto and say, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid."

THE FREEDOM OF ETHICAL FELLOWSHIP

FELIX ADLER

THE spirit of the Ethical Societies is expressed in the title of the present paper. They offer to their members a moral fellowship or comradeship, the distinctive mark of which is freedom ; the word being used primarily in the negative sense to indicate the absence of any limitations of the fellowship to the professors of a particular creed, or the adherence to a particular metaphysical system, while there is at the same time an underlying reference to the positive content of the term "freedom," inasmuch as it is the belief of those who established the Ethical Societies that the broader fellowship which they contemplate will prove favourable to the larger scope and exercise of the moral faculty itself.

Co-operation for moral ends is the aim of the Societies. There is, indeed, one department of morals in which the co-operation of persons widely differing in religious opinion and belief has, to a large extent, already been secured,—namely, in "good works." The abatement of the controversial spirit in theology and the softening of sectarian prejudices, in which our age rejoices, has brought about this happy result. It is, nowadays, no unusual thing to see Roman Catholics, Protestants of every denomination, Jews, and Freethinkers sit on the same charitable committees and unite in efforts to procure food for the indigent, to build hospitals for the sick, and, in what way soever, to relieve the needs of suffering humanity. Thus far the lesson of universal brotherhood has been impressed.

It is the aim of the Ethical Societies to extend the area of moral co-operation, so as to include a part, at least, of the inner moral life; to unite men of diverse opinions and beliefs in the common endeavour to explore the field of duty; to gain clearer perceptions of right and wrong; to study with thoroughgoing zeal the practical problems of social, political, and individual ethics, and to embody the new insight in manners and institutions.

Now, in view of the received opinion that a religious or philosophical doctrine of some kind is the only adequate basis for moral union, it will be necessary to explain and justify the position just announced in some detail. Let the reader put himself in the place of men who are sufficiently free from the influence of tradition to be willing to plan their lives anew ; who are as ready to question current doctrines, with a view of testing their real value, as the inhabitants of a distant star suddenly descending upon the earth might be conceived to be ; and who, moreover, happen to be supremely interested in making the best of their lives, morally speaking. They are told that it is indispensable for them to adopt some form of faith if they would succeed in what they propose. But here two objections present themselves. First, no single form of faith is universally adopted, and there is even to be observed a tendency in modern society towards increased divergence in matters of belief. The sects are multiplying. On the other hand, there are good men in all the Churches and outside the Churches. No one will deny that there exist in the Catholic Church veritable saints,—that is, persons who lead really saintly lives. No one will doubt that men of admirable character are to be found in every one of the greater or lesser sects into which the Protestant camp is divided. And no one who is not utterly blinded by prejudice will gainsay that persons enamoured of the "beauty of holiness" are also to be found among Jews and Freethinkers. They are at present hindered by the circumvallations of sectarian opinion from coming into touch, from working with united force towards the ends which they all alike cherish. It is necessary, therefore, in order to speed on these ends, to disregard the conflicting creeds. If the charitable work of society is better done because the most able and most zealous persons, regardless of sectarian divisions, combine to do it (and no one questions that this is so), is it not reasonable to expect that greater moral progress in other directions, too, would be achieved if all who love the right would help each other in the study and practice of it, no matter how they may disagree with respect to its ultimate sanctions? Moreover, since, in any community, the number of persons seriously and deeply interested in the ends of moral progress and capable of promoting them is small, it seems all the more intolerable that these few should be kept apart and estranged from one another. They should rather be brought together. The best men in every community should be formed into a coalition, so that their efficiency, both singly and collectively, may be increased, and that they may present a united front to the moral evils by which the very life of society is threatened.

The same objection lies against the adoption of a philosophical formula, or set of formulas, as a basis of moral union. In the first place, there is no philosophical system which commands universal assent. Is any one hare-brained enough to suppose that we can propose one? If not, then we must choose, and whichever way our choice may fall out we shall hinder moral co-operation. Shall we adopt the philosophy of Kant? of Hegel? of Schopenhauer? of Mill? of Spencer? of Comte? To select any one of these would be tantamount to ruling out the adherents of all the rest. But there are excellent men, men whose moral co-operation is worth having, in each of the schools. Why, then, exclude them? Why weaken the small band of earnest workers by drawing the line of demarcation along the narrow boundaries of any metaphysical theory? To adopt a philosophical formula as a basis of union would be to proclaim ourselves a philosophical sect; and a philosophical sect is the most contemptible of all sects, because the sectarian bias is most repugnant to the spirit of genuine philosophy. And there is yet another reason why it would be ill advised to build up a society—that is to say, an institution—upon opinion as a foundation. Not only can we never be absolutely sure that our religious and philosophical opinions or convictions are the highest expression of truth attainable in our day, since many of our contemporaries differ from us, but even if we possessed this certainty, it would still be a wrong and a hindrance to the further extension of truth, to raise above our opinions the superstructure of a social institution. For institutions in their nature are conservative; they dare not, without imperilling their stability, permit a too frequent inspection or alteration of their foundations. Let us be careful, then, how we embed opinions, which require constant modification, in such foundations. The wealth and depth of spiritual insight would, no doubt, to-day be greater in the world if spiritual truths had been kept in the fluent state, and had never been made the corner-stones of organised Churches. It is a significant fact that the highest reaches of the religious life were ever attained in the early days of religion, before the visions of the seers had crystallised into hard and fast dogmas; or during epochs of reformation, when the organised forms of creed and worship, till then prevalent, had been broken up and had not yet been replaced by others. Is it altogether a vain hope that the spiritual life may be kept plastic by leaving it hereafter to the free play of individual spontaneity?

The history of thought enforces the same lesson with regard to philosophic opinion. Wherever institutions have been established on the basis of a prescribed philosophy, the energy of the mind in the pursuit of truth has flagged and stagnation has set in. So long as Aristotle ruled the schools, the human mind sat like a caged bird within the bars of his system and seemed incapable of further flight. So long as a special kind of orthodox opinion was petted in every American college and anxiously protected against the intrusion of rival speculation, the American colleges hardly rose above the level of high schools. It is the influence of the German universities that is now setting them free. The principle of the German university exactly expresses what we have in mind. The German university permits conflicting theories to vindicate their claims within its walls. It has witnessed during the present century the rise and fall of a number of metaphysical dynasties which have successively occupied the throne of philosophy in its midst. But the university committed itself to none of these systems, conscious of a larger mission in the pursuit of ever widening and extending truth. And this is the secret of the commanding influence which it exerts throughout the civilised world to-day. The Ethical Society, so far as it is an institution devoted to the advancement of moral knowledge, adopts the principle of the German university. It is consecrated to the knowledge of the Good, but not to any special theory of the Good. All theories are welcome in so far as they can aid us the better to know, the more precisely to distinguish, right from wrong.

But an Ethical Society is an institution not for the advancement of ethical theory only, but also, and pre-eminently, for the improvement of ethical practice. And, it may be asked, how is this end to be attained, unless an agreement has previously been reached with respect to first principles? As some one has expressed it, "Men will not act as they ought unless they know why they ought." It is necessary to offer them a reason, or reasons, for moral conduct. Therefore, an Ethical Society without a philosophic or religious basis will necessarily lack coherence. Granted that it may subsist for a time on the enthusiasm of its leaders, yet it will crumble to pieces as soon as the compelling force of personal influence is withdrawn. Now this statement—that men will not act as they ought without a reason—is the fundamental objection which meets us at every turn. Is it well or ill founded? Certainly, an illiterate man of generous impulses may leap into the water to save the life of a drowning fellow-being without realising the theoretical grounds on which rests the doctrine of the sanctity of life. A good son may perform his filial duties without comprehending the moral theory of the parental and filial relations. A person who has received timely succour from another may display genuine gratitude towards his benefactor without being in the least capable of analysing the somewhat subtle principle which underlies the duty of gratitude. And the humblest citizen may lay down his life for his country without understanding the ideal of the state. Men have thought logically before ever they were acquainted with the formal rules of logic; even children use the syllogism without knowing so much as its name. Men admire what is beautiful and are displeased with what is ugly and deformed without being able to give an account of their preferences, much as men see without possessing a theory of vision and walk without understanding the mechanism of locomotion. There are certain predispositions, founded in the very constitution of the human mind, which impel and regulate its functions. These driving forces, coming from within, constrain our moral judgments. Conduct comes first; the laws of conduct are winnowed from experience, are won by reflecting upon the lines of conduct which we have actually followed, and comparing them with those which we are impelled to approve of. I would not be understood as saying that this instinctive morality is the best or the highest. I am engaged in refuting the fallacy which lies in the assumption that men will not act unless they know the reason why.

It is highly important to discriminate between the inextinguishable desire on the part of intelligent man to live in harmony with himself,—that is, to bring his emotional and volitional nature into agreement with his reason on the one hand, and the actual play of the motive forces which govern him on the other. It is one thing to say that, after men have acted for a long time and have reached the stage of reflective self-consciousness, they will try to borrow from the realm of ideas a sufficient reason for accepted rules of action, and another thing to maintain that men will not act at all unless they possess a reason. Nor is it possible to deny that, after these reasons have been formulated, they do modify human conduct, though to what extent they do so would be difficult to determine. Certain it is that men constantly act in obedience to motives, which are often worse, and sometimes fortunately better, than the doctrines they profess. Our reasoned-out scheme of ethics depends upon first principles,—that is, upon ideas with which we seek to bring our volitions into agreement. These ideas are imported from the region of speculation or of science. They are, necessarily, of various types, as represented for instance in the various systems of religion and philosophy, and there is a tendency towards ever-increasing variation. In regard to them, therefore,—that is, in regard to first principles,—it is hopeless to expect agreement. But the main leadings of the moral force within us, as exemplified in the preferences of civilised men, are, on the whole, in one direction. And we have only to observe these leadings to collect from them certain secondary principles, which will answer as a practical basis for moral union. The distinction between primary and secondary principles is vital to the Ethical Society. As an example of secondary or practical principles, I may mention the Golden Rule, which, though it by no means includes the whole of duty, covers a vital part of it. Consider the precept that we should act towards others as we would have them act towards us. Plainly, it may be defended on various grounds. The egotistic hedonist may advise us to act on grounds of enlightened self-interest. The universalistic hedonist may exhort us to carry out the rule in the interest of the general happiness. The evolutionist may recommend it on the ground that it is the indispensable condition of social order, and, therefore, of social progress. The Kantian may enforce it because it bears the test of universality and necessity. The follower of Schopenhauer may concur in teaching it on grounds of sympathy. Is it not evident that the simple rule itself is more certain, more safe, more secure, than any of the first principles from which it may be deduced? With respect to them, men have differed and will differ. With respect to the rule itself, there is practical unanimity. And it is the business of the ethical teacher to impress the rule; to lead men to obey it by the contagion of his own earnestness and example ; to extend the application of it to cases to which it has not yet been applied, and thus to refine the practice of it.

As Ethical Societies, we make the accepted norms of moral behaviour our starting-point and the basis of our union. "Whilst the parties of men," says Locke, "cram their tenets down all men's throats whom they can get into their power, and will not let truth have fair play in the world, nor men the liberty to search after it, what improvement can be expected of this kind? What greater light can be hoped for in the moral sciences? The subject part of mankind, in most places, might instead thereof, with Egyptian bondage expect Egyptian darkness, were not the candle of the Lord set up by Himself in men's minds, which it is impossible for the breath or power of man wholly to extinguish." It is to this "candle of the Lord set up in men's minds" that we look for illumination. It is in the light which it sheds that we would read the problems of conduct and teach others to read them. We appeal directly to the conscience. But it may be said, by way of criticism, that the utterances of conscience in different ages and among different peoples are variable and often conflicting. To which we answer, that we appeal to the conscience of the present age and of the civilised portion of mankind. Again, it may be said that, even in civilised nations, there is no complete agreement in regard to the standard of right and wrong. To which we answer that we appeal not to the abnormal, but to the normal conscience, as represented by the educated, the intelligent, and the good. Once more it may be objected that the moral judgment, even of the good, is often warped and deflected by the influence of passion and self-interest. To which we reply, that different men are apt to be tempted on different sides of their nature; that their judgment is likely to be correct in cases where their own peculiar weaknesses do not come into play, and that, on the whole, these deflecting influences mutually neutralise each other. There remains as a residue a common deposit of moral truth, a common stock of moral judgments, which we may call the common conscience. It is upon this common conscience that we build. We seek to free the moral life from the embarrassments and entanglements into which it has been involved by the quibbles of the schools and the mutual antagonisms of the sects; to introduce into it an element of downrightness and practical earnestness; above all, to secure to the modern world, in its struggle with manifold evil, the boon of moral unity despite intellectual diversity.

The contents of the common conscience we would clarify and classify to the end that they may become the conscious possession of all classes. And in order to enrich and enlarge the conscience, the method we would follow is to begin with cases in which the moral judgment is already clear, the moral rule already accepted, and to show that the same rule, the same judgment, applies to other cases, which, because of their greater complexity, are less transparent to the mental eye. That cases may arise under this procedure which the simpler rules will not fit, and which will compel the expanding and recasting of our ethical maxims, is a result as much to be expected as desired. For it is in this way that the moral knowledge of the race will be advanced, and that moral progress will be secured without prejudice to moral unity. "Life," says a well-known writer, "is the great antiseptic. The untrammelled action of the moral forces of society sustains its integrity as surely as the unhindered flow of a river sustains the sweetness of its waters." And not only does the application of ethical maxims to life sustain the integrity of morality, but it tends, in the manner just described, to the extension of its territory, to the reclaiming of those vast waste-lands of human conduct, which still remain, at the present day, unmoralised. Indeed, the "midwifery" of action in bringing to birth the true principles of action may be put forward as the cardinal thought of the movement in which we are engaged.

And here it may be appropriate to introduce a few reflections on the relations of moral practice to ethical theory and religious belief. To many it will appear that the logic of our position must lead us to underestimate the value of philosophical and religious doctrines in connection with morality, and that, having excluded these from our basis of fellowship, we shall inevitably drift into a crude empiricism. I may be permitted to say that precisely the opposite is at least our aim, and that among the objects we propose to ourselves none are dearer than the advancement of ethical theory and the upbuilding of religious conviction. Let me attempt to set this matter in a clearer light. Ethics is both a science and an art. As a science its business is to explain the facts of the moral life. In order, therefore, to improve it as a science, it is necessary before all to fix attention on the facts, to collect them, to bring them into view, especially the more recondite among them. It is necessary to effect in the treatment of the subject a revolution analogous to that which has taken place in the natural sciences,—namely, instead of beginning with theories and descending to facts, to begin with the facts and to test theories by their fitness to account for the facts. But the moral facts, unlike those with which the natural sciences deal, are not to be found in a stable, external order; they are discovered within ourselves, they are found in moral experience. Hence, the richer our moral experience is, the more likely we shall be to possess an adequate inductive basis for our moral generalisations. It is not from the solitary thinker who passes his days in the closet, apart from the varied life of men, not from the metaphysician who has spent the greater part of a lifetime in grappling with the fundamental conceptions of space and time, of matter and force, that we may expect the truest ethical philosophy. Many of the moral systems which have had a certain currency in the world plainly suffer from one fatal defect,—the shallow moral life of their authors. The superstructure of reasoning which they have raised is true to the approved rules of mental architecture, but the premises on which the whole is founded are narrow and poor. Rather will he be fitted to advance ethics as a science who unites with the discipline of the trained thinker a profound practical insight into the various moral relations, such as is gained only by experience. And, on the other hand, since the spread of right ethical theories depends quite as much on the public which controls as on the author who propounds them, it is equally important that the general public shall have the facts of the moral life placed within their reach. And this again can only be accomplished by leading them into the ways of moral experience.

Now, the Ethical Society sets men doing ; it insists on moral action. It thus tends to uncover the moral facts, to bring into view the deeper facts previously overlooked. And every addition to the fund of facts is in the nature of a provocative to the thinker, calling upon him to modify, purify, and enlarge his theoretical conceptions.

And again, ethics is an art As such its office is to offer suggestions for the practical improvement of conduct. But will these suggestions be forthcoming unless the likelihood exists that they will be appreciated ? Will there be a supply unless there be a demand ? The purpose of the ethical movement is to create such a demand, to collect into societies men who, being desirous of improving conduct, feeling deeply the need of moral betterment, will by their attitude of expectancy call such suggestions forth. Can any one doubt the great influence which the industrial arts have had upon the promotion of knowledge ? Can any one question that the desire to utilise electricity for practical purposes has had the effect of attracting eminent minds to the scientific investigation of electricity, with fruitful results, to the understanding of the subject on its purely theoretical side ? Can any doubt that chemistry as a science has gained by the solicitations which have come to it from the textile and other industries ? Or will any one deny that the fine arts attain their highest splendour when the artist is sure of a public prepared to expect and ready to appreciate the best he can do? When men are bent on having something done, so that it be within the compass of human capacity, there usually rise up those who will do it for them. The Ethical Society is a society of persons who are bent on being taught clearer perceptions of right and wrong, on being shown how to improve conduct. At least, let us hasten to add, the ideal of the society is that of a body of men who shall have this bent. Is it vain to hope that there will in time arise those who will render them the service they require?

To recapitulate, we maintain the capital importance of right motives, without which morality dwindles into mere legality. We impress the truth that the whole value of the deed is in the motive which inspires it. We take towards ethical theories a twofold attitude: holding it to be the prime duty of every one in his individual capacity to rise to the ever clearer apprehension of first principles, but for that very reason abstaining in our collective capacity from laying down any set of first principles as binding. We do teach ethical theories in our societies and hold ourselves free, each to the best of his ability, to defend and recommend his own. But our bond of union is not a common doctrine, but a common practice, a common understanding as to ways of living. Just as the refined and educated are distinguished from the vulgar by their manners, these, however, relating chiefly to externals of behaviour, so we may hope that the Ethical Society will in time come to be distinguished by certain modes of behaviour, these, however, related to the inmost matters of the soul. It is the aim of the Ethical Society to help its members to reach this higher normal development, and to this end to bring forth institutions in which the better life will be embodied and secured. The instrumentalities hitherto employed in furtherance of these aims have been chiefly educational,—schools for the better mental, moral, and æsthetic training of young children ; public lectures on Sundays ; the discussion on the platform and in classes of the principal moral problems, such as the right relations of the sexes in and out of marriage, the right relations of the social classes to one another, the moral side of economic questions, the true ideal of the state. The charitable work of the societies has been so far prominent as to appear in the eyes of some their distinctive feature, and the false impression has thus gained ground that the Ethical Society exists purely for philanthrophic or humanitarian purposes. But charity, apart from its importance as a social duty, has been employed by us chiefly as an educational instrument, as a pedagogue unto the higher life, as a plough wherewith to make the first incision into hearts hardened by selfish and sordid interests, to prepare them for the reception of the seed of moral ideas.

Finally it remains to speak of the attitude of the Ethical Society towards religion. Recent investigations in primitive culture have given us glimpses of a time when religion was still distinctly unethical. As we follow the line of development upward, we see that the ethical element is introduced at first as a subordinate factor, that it becomes gradually more and more prominent and dominant, and that religious conceptions become ever purer and more elevated in proportion as this moral factor works its leaven into them. It is safe to say that every step forward in religion was due to a quickening of the moral impulses, that moral progress is the condition of religious progress, that the good life is the soil out of which the religious life grows. Witness the prophetic movement among the Hebrews, the rise of Buddhism, the Protestant Reformation! And why may we not add the founding of Christianity itself to our instances, or rather place it at the head of the list? The teachings of Jesus, as they have been handed down to us, are capable of being condensed into the one great lesson,—that it is necessary to live the spiritual life in order to understand spiritual truths. The truths of religion are chiefly two,—that there is a reality other than that of the senses, and that the ultimate reality in things is, in a sense transcending our comprehension, akin to the moral nature of men. But how shall we acquaint ourselves with this Supersensible? The ladder of science does not reach so far. And the utmost stretch of the speculative reason cannot attain to more than the abstract postulate of an infinite, which, however, is void of the essential attributes of divinity. Only the testimony of the moral life can support a vital conviction of this sort. He who is enslaved by his senses will be sense-bound even in his thinking. But he who triumphs over his passions may realise in himself the impact of a spiritual force different in kind from the forces of nature. He who having received an injury returns it, obeys a mechanical law analogous to that which causes a cannon to recoil or an elastic ball to rebound. But he who forgives his enemy becomes conscious of a spiritual law to which the mechanical interaction of phenomena affords no parallel. Thus, too, he who in affliction so far prevails over his will as to assent to the loss of personal happiness, and goes on working and striving for the general good, ceases to be a mere atom among the circling worlds, and becomes aware in his own soul of that public nature in things to which he yields.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted;" "I say unto you, love your enemies;" "Whosoever looketh on a woman with an impure eye hath committed adultery already in his heart." Plainly, the precepts of Jesus enforce the truth that the purification of the heart is the condition of spiritual perception. "Only the pure in heart shall see." The symbols of religion are ciphers of which the key is to be found in moral experience. It is in vain you pore over the ciphers unless you possess the key. Face answers face as in a mirror, and only like can understand like. To understand the message of a great religious teacher one must find in his own life experiences somewhat akin to his. To measure the stature of those who stand on the pinnacles of mankind one must rise to an eminence in line with theirs, however inferior in height. To the children of the world,—that is, to worldly-minded men,—what meaning, for instance, can such utterances as these have? "You must become as little children if you would possess the kingdom of heaven;" "You must be willing to lose your life to save it;" "If you would be first you must consent to be last; if you would be masters you must serve." To the worldly-minded such words convey no sense; they are, in fact, rank absurdity.

The Ethical Society is planted outside the Churches for the reasons detailed above, but it should be regarded by them as a friendly ally. All the fruits it may be expected to produce,—the better moral training of the young, the clearer delineation of the boundaries of right and wrong, the awakened sense of responsibility with respect to social problems, the wiser methods of fashioning character,—all these the Churches may adopt and seek to harmonise with their own aims. The Ethical Society is friendly to genuine religion anywhere and everywhere because it vitalises religious doctrines by pouring into them the contents of spiritual meaning.

And beyond the Churches, also, it is fitted to embrace the ever-increasing masses of the unchurched, inasmuch as it provides for these a resting-place on their journey towards the new religious home. Nay, more than that, a movement for moral culture appears to be the indispensable positive condition of a new *avatar* of the religious spirit. A new moral earnestness must precede the rise of larger religious ideals. For the new religious synthesis, which many long for, will not be a fabrication, but a growth. It will not steal upon us as a thief in the night, or burst upon us as lightning from the sky, but will come in time as a result of the gradual moral evolution of modern society, as the expression of higher moral aspirations, and a response to deeper moral needs.

THE ETHICAL BOND OF UNION

FELIX ADLER

It is the object of these pages to give a brief account of the aims and purposes, more particularly of the American Societies for Ethical Culture, and of their relation to modern religious tendencies. Their general aim, as the name indicates, is simply ethical culture; neither more nor less. The term "ethical" was chosen in place of "moral" on the ground that "moral" connotes rather the external side of conduct, the conformity of actions to the standard of the moral law, while "ethical" refers more to the inner side of conduct, to the motives from which alone right acts derive their worth, to the source in the character from which right motives flow. It is, of course, the object of the ethical societies to promote both the good act and the good motive. There is at the outset an objection which has frequently been stated and requires to be met. What need can there be, it is asked, of a new association for the object mentioned?

Is not every Church a society for ethical culture? Is there any necessity for an ethical movement outside the Churches? Nay, is it not a waste of effort to attempt to do on the outside that which can be done within with far greater efficacy and more lasting results?

To this objection we are bound to answer in the first place that there are many thousands and tens of thousands of men and women at the present day whom the Church, for one reason or another, does not reach, on whom the teachings of religion have lost their hold. And in this class of persons are included not only many eminent professors of science, many leading writers and artists, many of those practical men who have achieved commanding success in commercial and industrial pursuits, but multitudes of the working-class, especially in our large cities. It has long ceased to be true that religious indifference is confined to the so-called upper class. It has gained ground and is daily gaining more and more ground among the people generally. The times have mightily changed since Goethe wrote his famous aphorism: "He who has science and art has religion; he who has not these two—let him have religion." Even the first of his two statements is true only of the select few among the followers of science and art, of those rare personalities to whom the love of truth and beauty has become an overmastering passion. The great majority of so-called scientists and artists are mere craftsmen, devoid of all high idealism, and derive no religious equivalents from their daily work. The second of his statements, whereby he remits those who have not science and art to the care of the Churches, has even to a greater extent lost its point.

Whatever may have been the situation half a century ago when Goethe wrote, to-day a wave of sceptical opinion is passing over the masses of the people in all civilised countries, so that the number is exceedingly large of those who neither have the idealism of science and art to support them, nor are willing or able to accept the current creeds, and who are therefore allowed simply to drift as best they may, wholly uncared for on the moral or spiritual side of their natures. The question therefore arises, and it is one which cannot be shirked in view of the moral dangers with which we are threatened, in view, for instance, of the alarming progress of the divorce movement, in view of the growing corruption of our politics, in view of the ever-increasing unrest and discontent of the labouring classes which it will tax the moral forces of society to the utmost to appease, —the question arises whether some effort should not be made to build up the moral life of those whom the

Church has ceased to influence, to develop the moral instincts of children, to fortify the character of the young against the temptations of intemperance and licentiousness, to cherish the love of justice and the capacity for self-sacrifice.

Now, if the acceptance of a creed were an indispensable condition of the moral life, the problem of reaching the unchurched could not be solved. For it is precisely the acceptance of the current creeds that has become impossible to many honest thinkers. And if morality and religious belief must stand and fall together, then the outlook into the moral future of the human race would be dark indeed. But it is at this point that the Ethical Societies have taken a new departure. The gospel which they preach is essentially this: that the good life is possible to all without the previous acceptance of any creed, irrespective of religious opinion or philosophic theory; that the way of righteousness is open and can be entered directly without a previous detour through the land of faith or philosophy. The word "righteousness" acquires in the Ethical Societies the supreme place. It is written in our Holy of Holies. It is pronounced with reverence and piety; it is the best thing in the world we know of.

This does not imply that belief in God or in Christ is denied. The Ethical Societies are not societies of freethinkers or agnostics. Many who belong to us are radicals and agnostics, but others are ardent theists. We think that we have found a new bond of fellowship, a new common ground upon which agnostics and theists and good men of all shades of belief and opinion can stand together; it is the common pursuit of righteousness, the supreme desire to see righteousness flourish on earth. But for those of us who have deep religious emotions, whose religious needs and aspirations are keen, the question of precedence as between religion and morality has been settled in a new way. Hitherto the opinion has prevailed that morality is the corollary of religion. Our own conviction is the very opposite, viz., that moral truth is the main proposition from which religious belief, if deduced at all, must follow as the corollary. Our conviction is that in proportion as a man becomes morally regenerate he will be open to the impression and influence of spiritual truth; that moral regeneration must come first, and spiritual insight will come afterwards, as it is written, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." First purity of heart, then the divine vision. The aim of the ethical movement, therefore, is moral regeneration—regeneration of the individual, and of human society as a whole.

The phrase, "mere morality," is often heard nowadays, and is commonly pronounced with a somewhat contemptuous accent, as if morality pure and simple were a poor and impotent thing. But to couple the belittling adjective "mere" with "morality" seems unwarranted, nay, blasphemous. One might as well speak to the lover of mere love, to the benevolent of mere charity, to the lover of his country of mere patriotism; and yet all these—patriotism, love, and charity—are but isolated rays of the sun of ~~righteousness,~~ which in the fulness of its light is more than they. And it may be stated as a fact that to many of those who have joined the Ethical Societies, this quote gospel of Righteousness has become a veritable salvation. There was a time when their life seemed utterly dark and desolate. Through no fault of their own, the faith which had been transmitted to them at their mother's knee had become uncertain; corroding doubt had attacked their most cherished beliefs; and, in the bitterness and anguish of the inner struggle which they underwent, it seemed to them that the world was emptied of all that is most sacred, and that life was robbed of all that gives it worth and meaning. But, as a star in the night, there rose above their heads the star of duty, and, as the dawn of day, there came into their hearts the conviction that, whatever else might go, something infinitely precious and sacred remains, something which they could not lose. They felt that the distinction between the better and the baser life remains, and that they could lead the better life if they only would, and that even in the attempt to do so there is inspiration and support and solace. Though the waters of scepticism might sweep away the whole superstructure of religious belief, the Rock of Righteousness remained, upon which they could build up their lives anew.

But, it may asked, what leverage is at our command? to what motives can we appeal to rouse men from their inertia and lead them to the pursuit of the moral goal? Savonarola, in one of those powerful sermons of his, the echoes of which have reverberated through the centuries, puts the question why it is that men choose the life of pleasure and worldly advantage rather than the good life, which on its own account is so much to be preferred; and he answers by saying that "their eyes are blinded by the mists of the world, so that they cannot see the good life in all its beauty." Could they do so, it would exercise upon them an irresistible attraction. In this statement is indicated the method of propaganda which every moral movement must use. The thing to do is for the teachers, the leaders, to see clearly the scheme of right living and to make others see it; to be aglow with moral passion, and to kindle in others the same fire; to be in earnest, and to infect others with their earnestness. Just as the teacher of art educates pupils and trains up artists by first himself seeing the hidden Beautiful and then helping others to see it; nay, so enhancing their faculty that they may see perhaps far more than he does,—so the moral teacher gains adherents and wins acceptance for his teachings by first seeing fine shades of right and wrong which perhaps escape the common eye, and possibilities of concord and co-operation among men which transcend the common hope, and then making others see what he sees. All the great moral movements of the world have radiated from great personalities. Christianity was built on the personality of Jesus. The creedmakers came afterwards, and they did not altogether improve on what they found before them. Doubtless the gift of moral vision is unequally distributed; the few who have possessed it to a paramount degree have become the world's great prophets and leaders. But the method of the supreme masters should be followed by the humblest of their successors, and it is as true to-day as in the days of Isaiah and of Jesus that by as much as a man sees, by so much will he influence.

What, then, is our attitude toward the Churches? Certainly it is not unfriendly; and, on the other hand, cheering words of recognition and messages of

God-speed have come to us not infrequently from them. The ethical societies cover ground which the Churches cannot cover ; they are missionary societies of the moral life *in partibus infidelium.* But they aim also to be more than that. They hope to render a service to the Church itself, and as to the nature of this service a few words of explanation will now be necessary.

The human mind cannot permanently abide in dualism. There lives in us an inextinguishable desire to bind together in unity our manifold experiences, to harmonise the world which we carry within us with the external world, the order of nature with the moral order. The demand for the reconciliation of Science and Religion is one that cannot be evaded, though the terms upon which the alliance shall be concluded may still for a long time to come be disputed. There was a time, indeed, when Science and Religion were completely at one. Science and Theology were married ; Theology was the husband, Science the wife. But the union was an imperfect one, because not founded on the recognition of the equal rights of the spouses. " The man was the head of the woman : " Science was subordinate to and oppressed by Theology. The change for the better did not come till the independence of Science was recognised, till she was left free to follow her own course, to seek truth wherever she might find it without being hampered by the requirement, prematurely imposed, of bringing her truths into accord with truths of a wholly different kind. And not only Science but Religion eventually gained by the change. The picture of the universe as it is unfolded to us by modern science is infinitely grander than that with which our pre-scientific ancestors were acquainted, and the conception of the Divine economy as entertained by modern religious thinkers has proportionately gained in sublimity and depth.

It would seem that a like state of things should now be brought about between religion and moral science. Moral teaching has been in the past and still is almost exclusively in the hands of theologians. The leading interest of these teachers, however, lies in the realm of doctrine, and they have had, as a rule, no special training for the scientific study of the subject of ethics. The consequence has been that the progress of moral science, like that of the natural sciences under similar circumstances, has been greatly retarded. It is true that ever since the Revival of Learning, philosophy has sought to wrest the field of morals from the control of theology and annex it to her own domain, and various imposing ethical systems have been erected on purely metaphysical foundations. But then the influence of philosophy on ethics is closely akin to that of religion. This influence is both good and bad. It is, on the one hand, the great value of formulas in general that they help us to see more clearly the facts which comport with them, and from this point of view the formulas of religion and philosophy have not been devoid of the greatest usefulness. There is perhaps no metaphysical system of ethics, no religious creed, that has not brought more clearly into view, or set into a brighter illumination, certain aspects of the moral life that had been less clearly apprehended before or wholly ignored. But, on the other hand, it is the vice of all formulas, whether religious or philosophical, that they tend to shut out from view certain other facts, certain aspects which do not fit into a formula; and therefore it is equally true to say that there has never been a philosophical system or a religious creed which has done justice to the moral life as a whole. What we need is that there should be in ethics the same relations between formulas and facts that already prevail in the other sciences.

Facts now are everywhere in the foreground, are observed and recorded with the utmost precision, and theories are treated as so many handles by which phenomena may be seized and the uniformities subsisting among them apprehended. Theories are made tributary to the explanation of facts, facts are no longer impressed into the service of theories. There is hardly a single generalisation of science, however widely accepted, that has entirely stripped off its hypothetical character. There is not a single scientific formula which the investigators of nature are not ready to lay aside if new facts should come into view which its terms do not cover. The one animating impulse of a scientific research is the desire to ascertain the truth. In like manner, the one determining motive of ethics should be the desire to promote the knowledge and the practice of the Right, and all religious and philosophical formulas should be tested by their ability to subserve this end. It is taking a false attitude to start with the assumption that any system of ethics is a perfect system, from which nothing may be subtracted and to which nothing requires to be added.

There is no doubt that all philosophies and all the great religions have contributed, though in unequal degrees, to the advancement of ethical thought and practice. But it is equally certain that the whole truth in the sphere of ethics has never yet been uttered, that we are still at the "cockcrow of civilisation," that the moral evolution of mankind, far from being complete, has only begun. The actual phenomena of the moral life have by no means been explored as they should be. The evolution of conscience among mankind generally has only begun to attract attention. The development of conscience in the young is little known. The scientific study of character which Mill proposed has remained a desideratum to this day ; and yet there is nothing more evident than that if we wish to form and reform human character, we ought to know a great deal more than we do about the material we are trying to shape. Then, again, the practical problems of ethics have not received the attention they deserve ; such questions, for instance, as those of the hygiene of the passions, the best methods for the training of the will, and again, beyond these, the larger problems that affect the welfare of society as a whole, the problem of justice as between the social classes, the problem of the moral functions of the State, and the like. In regard to all these matters there still exists the greatest uncertainty, the most deplorable confusion of thought. The general commandments of religion, such as "Love one another," the abstract formulas of philosophy, do not serve us when standing face to face with these specific problems ; and yet, if moral science is to have any value, it must help us by unravelling precisely such knots as these. It must prove its value by giving us more specific guidance.

There is ample occasion, therefore, for ethical culture work outside the Churches. There is room for teachers and preachers and societies that will make a specialty of ethics apart from religion. The principle of the division of labour or of the specialisation of effort which has been applied with the most salutary results in all branches of knowledge, and in all departments of practical life, should also be applied to the cultivation of religion and morality, and when applied will no doubt prove advantageous to both. The Church indeed will not forego its time-honoured privilege of directing the conscience of mankind, but neither is there any reason why the Church should object to seeing new opportunities of moral study and moral training created outside its boundaries. On the contrary, the Church should, and no doubt will, joyfully assimilate and adapt to its own uses whatever fruits meet for acceptance these new opportunities may call forth, and the results of ethical science will, in the end, conduce even more powerfully than those of natural science to clarify, refine, and exalt the religious conceptions of mankind.

Ethical culture has sometimes been compared to horticulture, and the comparison is not inappropriate. As the interest of the skilful gardener is centered on his plants and not on plants in general, so the ethical society is interested primarily in improving the moral life of those who belong to it. The regeneration of humanity as an aim is not forgotten, but chief attention is given to regenerating that section of humanity which the ethical society can reach. As the gardener seeks to discover what soil is best and what environment most favourable for his plants, so an ethical society seeks to discover the conditions under which the different species of human plants will best unfold. The aim in either case is definite. But by as much as the beauty of holiness transcends the beauty of flowers, by so much does the task of developing into the perfect stature of manhood and womanhood transcend in dignity and in the sacred feelings with which it is associated, every other merely secular pursuit.

In accordance with these views, the Ethical Societies have devoted themselves largely, and from the outset, to the business of education. The best Sunday-school teachers of the country are keenly alive to the defects of Sunday-school teaching as it is commonly carried on. To correct these defects, to devise a scheme of moral education for children, based on rational, pedagogical principles in harmony with the tendency of the New Education, has been a prime object. Then, too, school education in general has received special attention. It has been felt that the whole school and the atmosphere of every class-room should be permeated by the ethical spirit, that not alone the moral lessons proper, but the history lessons, the literature lessons, the discipline and government of the school, should have the ethical accent. Above all, it is believed that the school does not fulfil its true mission unless individualisation in teaching is carried to a far greater extent than has been customary: and to this end, in the school conducted under the auspices of the Ethical Society in the city of New York, new branches have been introduced, such as manual training; and increased stress has been laid upon the teaching of art and elementary science, with a view of affording increased facilities for testing the natural bent of every pupil, and of educating him along the lines which Nature seems to have marked out for him. The Ethical Societies have realised from the beginning that the elevation of the working-class is the one great moral problem of our age, and have endeavoured in various ways to contribute their mite toward its solution. They have been instrumental in organising, in addition to the Workingmen's School already referred to, Neighbourhood Guilds, Workingmen's Self-Culture Clubs, a Bureau of Justice, Economic Conferences between Business-men and Workingmen, District Nursing among the poor, and in the Erection of Model Tenement Houses. To further the scientific study of the problems these institutions suggest, they aided in establishing the

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School of Applied Ethics and the *International Journal of Ethics*.[1]

It remains to call attention to one other point. The ethical movement, in this respect like the Church, furnishes employment to a great diversity of talents. It requires the services of teachers of children, college professors, journalists, platform lecturers; of persons who charge themselves with the moral analogue of the "cure of souls;" and of preachers—preachers of righteousness. The last category especially offers a new field and opportunity to earnest and gifted men and women, who are now being deflected from their natural vocations. There are not a few students in the upper classes of our colleges and in theological seminaries, who feel what is termed a call for the ministry, who desire nothing so much as to be the moral helpers of their fellow-men in the peculiar way possible to the preacher, and who yet are deterred from choosing this career, and finally enter into other callings for which they are not half so well fitted and where they achieve but a meagre success, either because of intellectual difficulties besetting the doctrines they are required to accept or because, though faith is not wanting, they feel themselves to be still in the process of intellectual development, and do not wish to be pledged and bound to the articles of a creed which they are well aware they may outgrow later on. To such persons, the vocation of the ethical preacher affords a clear and admirable escape from their difficulties.

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[1] The institutions above enumerated owe their origin to the initiative of members or lecturers of the Ethical Societies, or of both, but they are now all under separate management, and many persons not otherwise affiliated with the ethical movement have largely contributed to their support. These various agencies of study and work are, of course, the merest beginnings. They are referred to only as indicating in a general way the practical drift of the movement.

In this vocation they can become the moral helpers of others. They can take hold of the world's woes and wrongs and strive to alleviate and redress them; they can become soldiers of the light battling for the cause of truth and justice. Whatever their present religious beliefs may be, they are not required to deny or to hide them. They have full liberty to express on ethical platforms the convictions which they hold most dear and sacred. But at the same time there is no mortgage upon their future thought, there is no fetter to hold back their mental pace. As their intellectual horizon widens their thought is free to expand, and to assimilate every new truth of which they may become cognisant. They are pledged to nothing except to promote, with all the power of brain and heart, the end of right living among mankind; and this is an end, the certainty of which to an honest nature can never become "clouded with a doubt."[1]

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[1] The subjoined statement is intended to define the attitude of the ethical movement toward religion. It has never been passed upon by the Societies, and should not be understood as in the nature of a formal declaration ; but it expresses the views of the present lecturers of the American Ethical Societies.

A Statement as to the Attitude of the Ethical Movement toward Religion.—There are two senses in which the word religion is commonly used. In the one sense it describes a passionate devotion to a supreme cause. In the other sense it is applied to affirmations concerning the connection between man's being and the Universal Being. The ethical movement is a religious movement in the former sense.

Those affirmations in regard to which dissent is inadmissible, determine the collective character of a movement. In regard to the connection between man's being and the Universal Being dissent among members and lecturers of Ethical Societies is admissible ; hence the ethical movement as such is not a religious movement in the latter sense.

In the ethical movement, lecturers as well as other members are free to hold and to express on the Sunday platform theistic, agnostic, or other philosophical beliefs. But they shall clearly indicate that these beliefs do not characterise the movement. They shall not seek to incorporate these beliefs into the statement of principles of an Ethical Society, and they shall not introduce at the general public exercises of the society forms or ceremonies which are founded on their private beliefs. But nothing in this paragraph shall be construed so as to exclude or reflect on the value of religious services among members of Ethical Societies when held in such a manner as to commit only those who take part in them.

Members of Ethical Societies shall be presumed to feel a serious interest in the moral end, but they shall not be required to express a belief that the moral end is the supreme end of human existence. For though the supremacy of the moral end is implied in the very nature of morality, it is not to be expected that this implication shall be clear to all whose interest is serious and capable of further development.

Lecturers of Ethical Societies, however, shall be expected to possess as a sure conviction the cardinal truth of the supremacy of the moral end. All persons otherwise competent, who accept this truth, and who, in virtue of it, assign to the principle of righteousness the sovereign place in the spiritual life, whatever may otherwise be their philosophical or religious opinions, shall be eligible as lecturers of Ethical Societies.

ETHICAL RELIGION

W. M. SALTER

THE moral nature is that by which we transcend ourselves and enter into an ideal region. Science, with its methods of observation and experiment, is limited to the world as it is. Ethics is essentially the thought of what ought to be. It is not an account of man as he is, nor is it a transcript and summary abstract of the facts of society ; it declares the law after which man should act, and in obedience to which society should be constituted. Ethics, in a word, holds up the picture of our ideal selves, and gives us back society transfigured. For man has two sides to his nature—one looking out on what is, the other on the better that might be. It is a meritorious task to analyse the body and brain and mind of man; to explore conscientiously and classify systematically the facts of human society. But psychology and sociology do not take the place of ethics, or even give its indispensable foundation. In the strict sense of the word, science—the science of man as truly as any other, knows nothing of right and wrong, but only of what is; of facts, and the law of their connection. To the pure understanding, virtue and vice do not exist. These notions arise in virtue of our judgment upon facts; and the organ of that judgment is other than that by which we learn of and explain the facts themselves: men call it Conscience. It pronounces upon the worth of facts; for they may sometimes seem as firm as the earth and as constant as day and night, and yet have no moral right to be. Such are injustice, unscrupulous self-assertion, wrong,—though they may be continuous with the course of history; and all the laws and institutions created under their influence are without binding force or obligation.

The safety and sanity of life consist in keeping in mind the higher ends and laws of our existence. For man is not only to know, but to do and to achieve. Strange, is it not, that man should not be content with what he sees; that he should turn his back on the known and familiar in search of something better; that he should stake his life sometimes on a hope or dream of his mind? Yet this, too, belongs to man: it is the ideal ends of human life calling on him for their accomplishment; and he, simple and loyal, does not fail to hear.

Ethical religion would turn men's thoughts this way. It would inspire to a new confidence in ideas. It would be essentially a practical religion—not practical and ideal, but practical because ideal. It would lay on men a burden, assign to them a task—a burden the only relief from which is in action; a task which is unescapable till it be accomplished. Like an architect's plan, an idea means nothing in itself: it proposes a new form of life, as the plan involves a new structure. For as the artist, whose soul images some form of the beautiful, seizes the brush or the chisel to portray it; as the thinker's burning thoughts drive him to utterance—so in the truly moral nature every idea of the good becomes a necessity, every thought of the higher a command; all that we dream of and that seems so far away becomes an end and goal for our action and our life. Yet how rarely is the full practical significance of the ideal side of human nature realised! In what illusions do men permit themselves in thinking of the ideal!

First, there is the æsthetic or sentimental mistake. Men wander into an ideal region to luxuriate there. The good is an object of delight; they contemplate it, love it, worship it, they say—do everything but obey it. Much of the religion of our day, orthodox and other, is but a kind of spiritual revelling, wherein men allow themselves the use of all kinds of fine sentiments and phrases, yet after which life is as flat as ever. This is unpractical idealism, but only because it is false idealism. That ideas are but the pattern after which we are to fashion our lives is not realised; the element of respect for them is wanting. If a man is not in the mood to act, if he will not become better, let him not think the ideas of the better at all. It is a kind of profaning of them to face them, and not to begin to act as they command.

Closely akin to this æsthetic or sentimental mistake is the philosophical mistake of regarding the ideal as another world alongside of the actual world. It is so easy to those who are accustomed to deal with ideas to think of them as real, substantial things. They become so familiar with them that the natural order of human thought is inverted; and the ideas are spoken of as real, and the actual world as an appearance. This seems to have been the Platonic view. Goodness, justice—moral ideas, as well as all others, Plato looked at as self-existent, independent entities. The ideal world was another literal world like our own, only more perfect. If this were so, what should we have to do but to lift our thoughts to that ideal world, and there find the rest and peace that are denied to us here?

That might be one kind of religion; but surely it would not be a practical religion. And what is more, it would be an illusionary religion ; for there is no such ideal world as Plato pictures. The Platonic world in its moral aspect is nothing more than the world as we should like to see it—the world as it ought to be. It is in truth nothing but an ideal for our world ; and to transform this actual order of our human life into an image of it would be the task of a practical religion. The truest word that could be addressed to us is, If thou wilt ever see the perfect, thou must create it ; till that time, thou rangest over the earth or through the heavens in vain ! The idea only of perfection is in us ; the perfect itself is to be. Men ask, Can we be satisfied with such a view ; can we be content to regard all that is higher and better only as a thought of our minds ? But a noble mind does not first ask, What is satisfactory ? but, What is true ? And I am sure that one who has been caught up by the thought of the higher, and has felt that the burden and the glory of accomplishing it rested upon him, would feel the richest satisfactions denied him if told that the higher was already real, and that he had only to open some fancied spiritual eyes to discern it. What meaning, what significance, would there be in our lives, with grand thought and purpose stirred, to learn that that which we were to do is already accomplished? "Certainly, cousin," said the gallant Earl of Pembroke, on coming up to the Earl of Derby before Auberoche, and finding the battle already won, "you have neither been courteous nor behaved honourably to fight my enemies without waiting for me, seeing that you had sent for me." That is an unsatisfactory view of life which leaves us nothing to do, which fixes on us no great responsibilities, which encircles us with no grand trusts. In truth, in our heart of hearts, we want to do, we want to dare; we do not care even to be assured of victory; there is a profound something in us which disdains the need of such assurances.

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And as the philosophical mistake is to the highest type of mind not only untrue and delusive, but unsatisfactory rather than satisfactory, so is the theological mistake. Theology gathers all our thoughts of the higher and better together, and conceives them in the form of a perfect person who rules and guides the world. There is a noble side to theology; I mean, of course, not as savages or narrow bigots, but as pure and lofty souls have conceived it. God is the perfect; there are no limitations, no failings there—measureless goodness, infinite justice, make up that image of the mind. And if the only alternative were between the world as it is, with no thought of anything above it by which to try it, and this lofty ideal of excellence which might be ever kept in mind, I do not see how we could hesitate in pronouncing which would be the better. We *must* look on all that is from some ideal standpoint; we must keep in our minds some high and unfailing standard of excellence; and until provision is made for this in the new order of things, the old belief will remain, and deserves to remain. For man has these two sides to his nature, of which I have spoken, and the most perfect knowledge of what is will not take the place of the thought of what ought to be. But the noble side of theology is easily disengaged from theology itself. When one ceases to believe in God in the ordinary sense, one does not need to drop flat to the world and life as we see them and know them. All that made that image admirable remains—all those higher qualities that we instinctively call divine and that mankind instinctively worships, wherever any hint or suggestion of them appears in human form—goodness, pity, boundless charity, unfailing justice.

We do not find these in the world, we do not see them in ourselves; and so, foolish creatures that we are, we jump to the conclusion that they are in another world, that they belong to God. And here is the ignoble side to theology; for not only is the personal Deity of theology illusory, but by gathering the divine qualities into a form outside of man, it allows us to forget that they are qualities for man, and religion becomes the worship of something already existing, instead of the sense of a burden and a task. *We* are to become divine: we are to make this world a scene of justice. All that men have gathered into the form of a God is but the image of our possible selves. We make a myth of love and justice when we say that they are actually ruling in the world, as Christian believers hold; or as Emerson says, that "though ministers of justice fail, justice never," and that the ethical laws are self-executing, instantaneous.[1] Justice is forever failing in the world. Whenever ministers of justice fail, it fails; for it acquires a real existence only in those who execute it. Aside from them, it is only what ought to be, not what is. There are no self-executing, instantaneous, ethical laws; though one might well, when one thinks of all the unrequited wrong there is in the world, wish to heaven that there were. The laws are over us, but they wait for us to execute them; they are shorn of their intent, as our lives are of their significance, if we do not execute them. We can only say that the ethical laws *should* rule in all our lives, that justice forever calls for ministers; and of love, not that it is supreme in the world, but *let* love, as Buddha said, even the love that fills the mother's heart as she watches over an only child, animate all. For the ideal itself of the old religions is not essentially different from that of the new. The old however say, The ideal *does* rule:

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[1] "The Preacher."

the new will say, Let it rule! The old religions appear to open to us the secrets of what lies behind the veil; the new will take those august secrets, and make them in all their grandeur the aim and the rule of human life. The old religions leave us on our knees in rapt contemplation and worship; the new will summon us to stand erect, and to believe that all men have worshipped, all that they have dreamed of, all that has seemed so far above them and beyond them, men and women in the future are to become and to realise.

But why, if man's ideals do not reveal anything outside ourselves, but only indicate what we ourselves should be and do—why do we speak of devotion to them as religion at all? I do not covet that word, and disbelieve in all the prevailing forms of religion. I do not begin with any attempt to compromise with them. And yet I am driven to speak of religion—not indeed in the common way, as of something additional to morality, but of morality as religion.

This may be made evident in two ways. Religion from the purely human side might be defined as man's supreme interest: whoever has an absorbing concern may be said to have a religion. We often hear persons spoken of as religiously devoted to some object, religiously faithful in some attention, some regard, some affection. There are those who have memories that are to them a religion—statesmen to whom the service of their country has been a religion, reformers who give their lives and fortunes in religious devotion to the service of some idea. Those who care for no one thing more than another, who have no enthusiasm, who are listless and cannot be conceived as rising to any height of self-devotion—these are properly the irreligious people of any time. In vain would the most perfect theory of life and the universe be called a religion, if it could not stir the souls of men, if it could not take hold of life and mould it into higher forms. If morality, then—if the thought of the good becomes supreme over all other thoughts in the minds of any, if it enlists their feelings and masters their life, it is their religion. I believe, indeed, that there is no other thought that wins so instinctive a reverence as this of the good; that conceptions of the Deity and plans for a truer society take deep hold of men only as they in some sense imagine or embody it. The question whether morality can become a religion for men in general, is the question whether men in general are capable of unselfish admiration; whether they can love the good unmoved by personal fears and hopes, because it *is* the good, and has an intrinsic charm for them. I do not doubt it. I believe we ordinarily think too meanly of man. The higher nature is in us all: it is not often appealed to, and it is perhaps for this very reason that human life remains on so low a level. Let a new religion arise which should dare to take man at his best, which should summon him to justice and generosity and all nobleness, solely because these are his true and proper life, and I believe the world would be astonished at the answer.

But religion may also be defined from the objective side. In this aspect, it is man's relation with what is ultimate and supreme in the world. The truest religion would be that one in which the supreme interest gathers about that which is really supreme and ultimate in the world. Now, morality, truly interpreted, does bring man into contact with the final nature of things. Whatever else I may doubt about, I cannot doubt the law of duty—that there is a right and a wrong; that the right obliges me, that I ought to do it. It makes no difference that I have learned this law, that others have learned it before, that I know little more about it than I have received or been taught; it makes no difference that I do not know it now perfectly, that I may err sometimes in my judgments about it. Still, I am sure, as Dorothea in the story was,[1] that there is a perfect right if I could only find it. Sometimes I wish to do the right; and sometimes, again, it seems hard, forbidding, and I do *not* wish to do it. But the right itself does not change with my wishes and wants. I might unlearn it; I might, under the solicitations of some desire or passion, juggle myself into the belief that it no longer existed. Yet the right would not itself cease because my thought of it ceased. I might die and others take my place, yet the right would exist for them as truly as it had existed for me. Whenever, wherever, two persons arise and look into each other's faces, the law of mutual reverence and respect —the law of justice we call it—obtains. If they do not own it, it is the law all the same; if they act contrary to it, and defy every prescription of it, it is the law all the same. Plainly, men do not make this law, but simply find it. If there are other rational beings than men, it applies to them just as truly; the law is a universal law for all rational intelligence. As little do the earth and the stars make the law of gravitation which they obey, as does man or the combined host of rational beings throughout the universe make the law of duty. And though no God were, as God is ordinarily conceived, the law would not cease to be. It is not made, and cannot be changed by God or man; it belongs to the nature of things. Yes, more truly than the law of gravitation does it belong there. I can see no necessity in the law of gravitation; I can conceive that there might be a different law than this according to which bodies attract one another directly as their mass, and inversely as the square of their distance from one another. But no other law is conceivable for rational beings than that of justice, of mutual reverence and respect; never conceivably could it become right to think lightly of another human, or any rational, being. And yet men have failed in reverence, in respect, for others; have unblushingly used others, are so failing and using them to-day. How rarely has the law been obeyed! The law is over all, though it were never obeyed.

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[1] "Middlemarch."

In this way morality becomes religion. He alone does a genuinely moral act who does it because he must, because the nature of things bears down upon him to do it. For the crystal, religion would be to become a crystal; to own the pressure that would yield the perfect form. For man, it can only be to be a man, to perform the human part of the universal task. Morality is simply one form of the universal law; and in the yielding to its demands man is lifted out of himself, and as the tides of ocean throb "respondent to the far-off orbs," so do his pulses beat in unison with the movement of the universe. Yet how little is the transcendent significance of morality realised in these days! How often are divine and eternal things contrasted with it! Ethics covers simply the equities and amenities of this world, it is sometimes said. But there is no equity of this world; there is only equity, as good, as commanding on any other shining planet as on this. "Beyond and above the moral virtues the soul needs a religious life, fed from above," so reads a Unitarian tract. Whence come then the moral virtues? From below, from prudence, from the sense of decency, from long-sighted selfishness? They who think so never breathed the climate of morality. Channing, when a youth of nineteen, wrote: "All my sentiments and affections have lately changed. I once considered mere moral attainments as the only object I had to pursue. I have now solemnly given myself up to God." This is an unmeaning antithesis, a part of the falsehood of the old religious culture, which he afterwards himself detected; for twenty years later he wrote: "The love of God is but another name for the love of essential benevolence and justice," and the object of religion is, not to "raise us to something higher than morality, for that would be to raise us above God himself, but to give us sublime ideas of morality." Ethics is a pure concern of man with man, it is often said; it is religion that binds us to a higher order of things. Yet ethics is nothing but the response which man and man make to the higher order of things; for the reason of justice is, not that another wants it and I choose to give it, but that he ought to have it and I ought to give it. The duty is absolute, not conditioned on our will or thought, but given to us in and by the nature of things. Ethics realised in its meaning is religion ; it is the only religion for the rational man. In my humblest human service, I may be conscious of owning the call which a higher—nay, the highest—makes upon me. Aspiration, reverence, awe, all those sentiments so often contrasted with morality, are but uncompleted morality ; and when the moral act is done, ecstasy is its sign—ecstasy, which is the grace heaven sets upon the moment in which the soul weds itself to the perfect good.

In speaking of an ethical, an essentially practical religion, I have not in mind simply a few superficial improvements on the old religions. I mean not simply a little more "practical work," a little more attention to the necessities of the poor, a little better education of the young among them, a making of their life a little cleaner, neater, healthier, more respectable. An ethical religion would mean this, but only because it means vastly more. It is nothing else than a changed thought of the nature of religion which I have in mind ; namely, that it can be no longer for rational men to-day to worship or pray, but to have the sense of a task, the sense of somewhat limitless to accomplish, and to accomplish it. The Christian Church sings in one of its hymns :

"Oh, where are kings and empires now,
Of old that went and came?
But holy Church is praying yet,
A thousand years the same."

Might it not go on praying a thousand years more, and no better result come of it? If we must pray, let us pray to men; for there all the trouble lies. Could you, O Churches, but open the hearts of your worshippers, as you seek to move the heart of God, the need for all other prayer would soon be gone! Religion does not consist in seeing the evil and wrong in the world, and trusting that somehow in the counsels of God it is all for the best, but in confidently attacking the evil and the wrong, and in leading on the good, as John Stuart Mill says, to its distant and yet not uncertain triumph. The truest revelation, the truest voice of the nature of things, is not in what we see, but in our thoughts of what ought to be. Trust thy dreams, O Reformer! thou comest never so nigh to the heart and spirit of things as in them. This that thou seest, this that seems so strong, so secure, so impregnable, will after a time vanish away; and what thou thinkest of, what thou art called visionary for daring to think of, will *then* be the real!

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To the finest flower of New England culture, to Emerson, was given the insight into the essential identity between morals and religion.[1] I scarcely know what true thought of mine the reader will not find, stripped of its imperfections of statement, in him. It was he who long ago spoke of the consolation, the hope, the grandeur that come alone out of the culture of the moral nature.[2] Theology was to him the rhetoric of morals.[3] "The mind of this age," he says, "has fallen away from theology to morals. I conceive it to be an advance" Unbelief to him was losing hold of the moral intuitions.[4] Religion was the practices, private and social, in honour of the moral sentiment.[5] The commanding fact which he never lost sight of was the sufficiency of this sentiment.[6] He will not allow that ethics does not satisfy affection,[7] or that it gives only a rule, and not the spirit by which the rule is animated.[8] All the religion we have, he says, is the ethics of one or another holy person.[9] And whenever the sublimities of character are incarnated in a man, we may rely that awe and love and insatiable curiosity will follow in his steps.[10] "No man," he says, "can tell what religious revolutions await us in the next years; and the education in the divinity colleges may well hesitate and vary. But the science of ethics has no mutations; and whoever feels any love or skill for ethical studies may safely lay out all his strength and genius in working that mine. The pulpit may shake, but this platform will not. All the victories of religion belong to the moral sentiments." He has a faith that America shall introduce a pure religion,[1] since a true nation loves its vernacular tongue, and will not import its religion, as we have ours from Judea.[2]

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[1] "The Sovereignty of Ethics" (in Lectures and Biographical Sketches).

[2] Divinity School Address.

[3] "Character" (in Lectures and Biographical Sketches).

[4] "The Preacher."

[5] "Sovereignty of Ethics."

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] "Character" (in Lectures and Biographical Sketches).

[9] "Sovereignty of Ethics."

[10] "Character."

It is a grand task, to attempt to translate the old truths of the moral nature into the language of to-day. Theology is not more, but less than the truth. Life in the future shall not be less, but more freighted with significance than ever before; for no longer shall men be wondering spectators of a divine task accomplishing in the world, but themselves the accomplishers of it, themselves the hands by which the eternal purpose realises itself.

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[1] "Sovereignty of Ethics."

[2] "Character."

THE TRUE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS UNION

W. M. SALTER

I HAVE had the privilege of expressing myself with the utmost freedom in the preceding pages.[1] It is, however, one thing to express one's views freely, and another thing to propose them as a basis of religious union. This I am distinctly unwilling to do. All that one can ask at the present time is that he shall be free to think and to express himself, that he shall not be put under the ban because his views do not accord with old-time standards; but to propose any new set of views [2] as a part of the basis of religious fellowship would be so far to revive the intolerance of ancient orthodoxy.

I wish to ask now, not what is the truth with respect to various doctrines, ancient and modern, but what should make the fundamental terms of fellowship in a religious body? This is an entirely practical question, though I am aware that in trying to answer it I may develop an ideal of religious fellowship which has little or no relation to any existing religious movement.[1]

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[1] This is the last chapter of Mr. Salter's book on "Ethical Religion."

[2] Mr. Frederic Harrison declares that the Positivist "bond of union is a real, scientific, demonstrable conception of Nature and of man" (*Unitarian Review*, March, 1888, p. 236).

In general, I conceive that assent should not be required in a religious body to any truth about which it is possible for a thoughtful and good man to doubt. The basis of fellowship should be so broad that no person striving for an ideal order of human life, no one striving to live blamelessly before conscience, should be perforce excluded from it. Hence, assent to the doctrines of Catholic or Protestant Christianity, or even of pure theism, should not be required. No one will deny that serious and good men can, and in some cases do, question these doctrines. Shall they, therefore, be excluded from the most sacred of all unions between man and man? For my part, there is no materialist or atheist who yet loves and pursues the good, who feels that truth and honour bind him, whom I do not wish to call in the deepest and most sacred sense my brother.

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[1] The only bodies of which I have any knowledge, whose platforms suggest such an ideal as I have in mind, are the Free Religious Association, the Western Unitarian Conference, and the Union of the Societies for Ethical Culture. The Free Religious Association aims "to promote the practical interests of pure religion, to increase fellowship in the spirit, and to encourage the scientific study of man's religious nature and history." The Western Unitarian Conference declares its "fellowship to be conditioned on no doctrinal tests," and welcomes "all who wish to join us to help establish truth and righteousness and love in the world." The aim of the Ethical Movement, as represented by the Union, is " to elevate the moral life of its members and that of the community ; and it cordially welcomes to its fellowship all persons who sympathise with this aim, whatever may be their theological or philosophical opinions."

The truth which it appears impossible to doubt is that *duty binds a man.* Not that we always know our duty, and not that we need always be sensible of its binding force. There may be—to quote from Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty"—

> "Glad hearts, without reproach or blot,
> Who do thy work, and know it not!"

For duty may become one with life, happiness, and joy; the antagonism between what we wish to do and what we ought to do may pass away. Yet duty does not cease to *be* binding because it is no longer *felt* to be. We may sometimes be ignorant of duty; but when we learn what it is, we know that we are bound by it. It is also true that men may differ in their theories of the ultimate grounds of duty; but the fact of moral obligation and the broad outlines of personal and social duty remain under any theory. The truth is, that the thought of what *ought* to be is as elemental a part of man's being as the sense of what *is.* It is even possible to be more clear as to what we ought to do than as to what we actually have done or are doing. We know we should be just: whether we are so or not may be often a difficult question to decide. The thought of the right is indeed one that cannot be outgrown, that has entered into every religion worthy of our reverence, that even the savage has in some half-conscious, imperfect fashion, that man can lose only as he loses his reason. One could easier drive the sun from the heavens than banish the moral sentiment from the mind of man. I can imagine our living under other skies, in other spheres, and all the dear, familiar experiences of this earthly life no longer known; but without the moral sentiment we should cease even on the earth to be men, and the sun and all the stars would shine only on vacancy. We cannot say, however, that the propositions of the Athanasian or even the Apostles' Creed are thus rooted in the nature of man; neither can this be said of the theistic or perhaps any distinct speculative doctrine. A true religious fellowship, then, would not oblige assent to any of these doctrines; it would require only the recognition that *duty binds a man.*

Positively speaking, the ideal religious body would be a union of all those who owned the authority of duty, and who sought to live as duty commands. The fellowship aimed at would be that of all good men; that is, of all striving to be good and to advance the cause of goodness in the world. For the omission of a doctrinal basis does not mean a "mush of concession," or the drowning of conscience in sentimentality. Not because one is a human being, but because he strives to realise the ideal of humanity in his life, and to contribute to the establishment of an ideal order of human life on the earth, should he be welcomed to the moral communion. Love cannot have fellowship with those who hate ; just men cannot be joined in sacred union with tyrants and oppressors ; men who are trying to lead pure lives cannot fraternise with those who are reckless and profligate. Conditional for admission must be the desire to purify oneself of all that is unworthy, to live according to one's best ideals. But other conditions should be unknown. One should not be obliged to confess oneself a Christian or to confess oneself a Jew ; the antagonisms of Protestant and Catholic, of Evangelical and Unitarian, should be forgotten ; all barriers should pass away save those which conscience sets up.

I am aware that the realisation of such an ideal involves a great change in the habits and sentiments of men. It argues a new object of central interest, a new enthusiasm, a new magnanimity blended with a new ardour. It is not uncommon to hear, even in the most liberal of Christian denominations (the Unitarian), that a religious body must, as a matter of course, have religious doctrines.[1] It seems to be taken for granted that good and earnest men who differ intellectually cannot belong to one fellowship, that varying theological or philosophical views are necessarily more potent to divide than moral aims can be to unite. It is a sad and saddening opinion; yet I am afraid there is more in the religious history of the race to confirm it than there is to encourage the aim I cherish. Never has there been, to my knowledge, such a fellowship as I crave. Men seem always to have been ready to magnify their intellectual agreements or disagreements, and to put a slight on the good purpose and the pure heart. I have come across, indeed, in Matthew Arnold's essay on "Saint Paul and Protestantism," [2] an observation of Epiphanius, one of the Christian Fathers, to the effect that in the primitive period of the Church wickedness was the only heresy; that impious and pious living divided the whole world into erroneous and orthodox. I should like to believe that this was so, and no doubt there was some approximation to it; but I am afraid that it was largely an ideal of the bishop's mind, transferred to a time in regard to which he had imperfect knowledge. In any case, not much later than the time of Epiphanius, when a bishop was charged in a Church council with unchastity, the cry went up, "What do we care about his chastity? Is he orthodox?—that is the question;" and again, "Worse than a Sodomite is he who will not call Mary mother of God!"[1] No! history does not give much encouragement to such a fellowship as I propose; and as with morality in general, the dream of a moral basis of religious union is an ideal of the heart rather than anything else. Those who believe in it will have to strive for it: it will not come of itself. Yet it has on its side, I make bold to say, the best instincts of not a few men to-day; the larger minds in almost all the historic Christian communions are moving in this direction, though they may be far from having a clear vision as yet of the goal. Any one who is impatient with old walls of separation between Churches, and asks that all who love the Lord Jesus Christ shall join hands for united warfare against sin and wrong, really works in this direction; any one who still more generously summons all, whether Christians or not, to unite in the love of God and the service of man, really works in this direction. Yes, both are prophets, however unconsciously, of that grander fellowship to come, which shall include all who, whatever their differences in the past and whatever their intellectual differences still, are ready to work together to put down the evil and to enthrone the good in the world.

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[1] See "The Unitarian," October, 1888, p. 442.

[2] Page 120.

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[1] See an article by Rev. Dr. F. H. Hedge, in "The Unitarian Review," January, 1884, p. 14.

Let me now state a little more distinctly what a moral basis of fellowship would involve.

First, it would not necessitate the giving up of any theological or philosophical beliefs which one might hold dear. Because one's beliefs are not made a part of the bond of union does not mean that one shall not be free to hold them. If one found satisfaction in the theistic theory of the universe, he should be free to cherish it; if one felt compelled to be an agnostic as to the nature of Deity, or if one took materialistic ground, he should be equally free. The aim of the fellowship would not be to make theists or materialists or agnostics, but to confirm the good purpose in the soul, to make good citizens, good fathers and mothers, to make lovers of justice and haters of all wrong. If one wished to keep company only with those of his own creed, he would of course not enter the body; but the body would not exclude him: he would simply, by the narrow range of his sympathies, exclude himself. One would not have to renounce Christianity or Judaism in entering the fellowship; his entering would simply involve a willingness to live on terms of brotherhood with others who might not be Christians or Jews; that is, he would give up Christianity or Judaism as the basis of religious fellowship.

Secondly, the free expression of theological or philosophical opinions would not be prevented any more than the holding of them. It might even happen that those who were drawn together by the affinity of intellectual conviction would form subordinate groups, just as those who were united in holding to certain practical solutions of the problem of society might do the same. Uniformity is not to be expected or desired; uniformity is apt to be the high road to spiritual death, while unity in variety means life. The only necessity would be that no group should make so much of its peculiar views and aims that it would be in danger of losing sympathy and the sense of union with the body at large. One fellowship with many branches, one body with many members, one subtle life-blood running through the whole and making every part kin to every other—that would be the ideal of a true religious fellowship.

Hence, thirdly, a new meaning would attach to heresy in connection with such a fellowship. That word, I well know, is no longer covered with opprobrium. Men who have stood faithful to the light that was in them, and have refused for the sake of life itself to be untrue to it, have made heresy almost glorious. Apart, however, from its historical associations, the meaning of heresy is simply separation : a heretic is one who is separated, or separates himself, from a religious body. Whether heresy is honourable or dishonourable depends, then, on the attitude of the religious body in question. The Christian Church has not allowed liberty of thought, save within comparatively narrow limits : it has even decreed from time to time that certain ideas were to be accepted on pain of eternal damnation. The Church has thus become to many minds a very emblem of intolerance. A fundamental principle, however, of the ideal religious fellowship I have in mind would be freedom of belief ; the body should neither decree nor prescribe, nor in any way stand for, any set of theological or philosophical opinions. The query might arise, would not heresy cease to have any meaning in connection with such a body ? It certainly would, in the customary sense of the word. There would be neither necessity nor motive for any one to leave the body, to the end of gaining liberty of thought or utterance. But suppose that another set of motives should arise. Suppose that the theistic members of the body should say, " Our theism has become so precious to us that we cannot hold out any longer the fraternal hand to materialists or agnostics." Suppose that agnostics or materialists should say, " We cannot have patience with theism ; it is an antiquated, exploded doctrine, and we must refuse to fraternise with those who cling to it." Suppose a socialistic group should say, "Individualists must necessarily be without heart or conscience;" or that individualists[1] should retort that socialists must be bad men. In any of the cases, the fundamental bond of union of the religious body would be assailed; each and every group which thus withdrew and formed a new body would be, in the literal sense of the word, heretical. Instead of standing for freedom, heresy would thus stand for the spirit of intolerance. The heretic would be one who refused to concede to others the same rights he claimed for himself; who said in effect, "I am determined that all others shall think as I do, and if they do not, I will have no part or lot with them."

No one has argued more finely against the sectarian, dissenting spirit than the late Matthew Arnold. "The dissidence of dissent and the protestantism of the Protestant religion" was the object of his delicate and yet merciless satire. The various dissenting bodies in England were for the most part "hole-and-corner" Churches, out of relation to the great common religious life of the English nation. His argument was only vitiated by the assumption that the Church of England was representative of that nation's common religious life. He called it "a national association for the promotion of goodness." It is in truth not only that, but an association equally well for the promotion of the ideas embodied in the Apostles' and Nicene, not to say the Athanasian, Creeds. But though in judgment he was wrong, his ideal was right. There should be an association in every nation for the promotion of goodness—one that would gather to itself all the elements in the nation ready to work for that high end: whether it should have any official connection with the political organisation of the nation is another matter; I think not. And when a genuine and all-inclusive society of this nature does arise, whether in England or elsewhere, then all that Mr. Arnold so eloquently said of the spirit of dissent will hold good. Then the separate Churches that may be set up by the theistic or agnostic or socialistic or individualistic sects will be justly called "hole-and-corner" Churches; but, I must add, not till that day. Almost all the dissenting Churches in England, and almost all the separate denominations in this country, have had an excuse for being; they have arisen because freedom was not allowed in the Mother-Churches from which they separated. Better disorder and confusion and an infinite number of "hole-

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[1] I am aware that all these minor classifications are somewhat arbitrary, and beg that they shall be taken simply as *attempts to illustrate* the principle I am seeking to elucidate, not as necessary implications of it.

and-corner" Churches than despotism and iron law. When a better day shall dawn, however, and a religious order with liberty—making, indeed, a principle of liberty—shall arise on the earth, then only could narrowness and bigotry, the very spirit of schism and odious heresy, lead to separation from it.

Fourthly, it would follow that through the entire body, and in all its groups and local branches, more should be made of the common aims and ideals of the body than of anything else. A theistic branch which made more of theism than of the love and practice of goodness, would be forgetting its functions as a branch of the general body, and in danger of becoming sectarian. A materialistic group which gave itself up to expositions of materialistic philosophy, would be in similar danger. Varying philosophical views or economic aims could only make a kind of atmosphere in each group or branch, but could not take the form of a creed or binding statement. The basis of local fellowship should be the same as the basis of the general fellowship; nothing should be *required* anywhere which was not required everywhere. In other words, the questions of personal and social morality should have the first (I do not say the only) claim on the attention of every branch or local organisation. If from any meeting some one should not go away with clearer light as to duty, or with some fresh impulse towards the ideal life, the holding of that meeting would be well-nigh vain. Duty is not a formula, it is a life; it is as full, as many-sided, as exhaustless as life—yes, it is often as perplexing as are many of the situations of life. There are few men who do not sometimes crave light, or help and inspiration to follow the light they already have. Right living is in one sense the most natural thing to man; in another, it is at times a most difficult and arduous thing, and seems to require almost superhuman watchfulness and strength. Those most honest with themselves are the aptest to feel that the better part of them is not what they are, but what they aspire to be. As for our actual selves, some of us know we are self-conscious, anxious for notice, tickled with applause, without seriousness, and good only by impulse. Others know they are proud, glorying in mastery and in having others obedient to them. Others still are full of irrational aversions and prejudices, and scarcely try to let the calm, purifying light of reason penetrate their minds. Some are sensual, and others are close and ungenerous. Then in the realm of social morality how we flounder! We know that selfishness as a principle is disorganising and anarchic, and yet our industrial order is to a great extent founded on it, and we think it is all right! We call it in the abstract a devilish maxim, that every one should look out for himself, and woe betide the hindmost; yet in our business relations we are apt to act upon it, and there are those who can scarcely imagine business being conducted on any other basis. Ethics, the principles of justice and love, are pooh-poohed when they are sought to be applied in this realm; to advocate them is thought to be sentimentalism or, at best, philanthropy. The religious world is divided into theological camps, when it ought to be a unit in devising a plan of peace and brotherhood for the industrial life of society. It is not enough to preach the Golden Rule; it is necessary to say what the Golden Rule means. To hold up more elevated ideals of personal and social life, to create and to sustain an enthusiasm for them, to lift life actually to higher levels—this would be the sovereign and the central mission of a true religious body.

But, it may be asked, is all this religion? Is it not morality? I answer, that for my own part it is impossible to distinguish between them. Morality is only true morality when it is given religious consecration, and religion is first a truly sacred thing when it becomes an exalted moral enthusiasm. I am aware that, historically, religion arose independently of morality—as, happily, morality arose independently of religion. But the deepest thing, the root-thing in religion was not so much any peculiar object to which the religious sentiment went out, as the feeling that the object was sacred. It is reverence and awe that make the heart of religion. Whoever holds to something as sacred, has a religion or the elements of one. It is a mistake to bind up religion with any special theory of the universe ; he who consciously has no theory may yet be religious, if, as he turns his mind this way and that, it falls sooner or later on something that strikes him with indescribable awe and reverence. Duty—the thought of the laws under which we live, of their inviolable nature, of their supreme authority, in obedience to which is safety and life and joy, and in departing from which we stray into darkness and the night—may as truly excite awe as did the phenomena of Nature, the powers of earth and sky, which first enchained the attention of the forefathers of the race. The religion of morality may be as real and as sacred as the religion of Nature, of which almost all historical religions are varied forms. The most perfect religion, to my own mind, would be a blending of the religion of morality and the religion of Nature into an ideal unity.

But whether such a fellowship as I have sketched the ideal of, would be *called* religious or not is a comparatively unimportant matter. It might not call itself religious, conscious of the uncertainty and ambiguity in the current use of that term; and there would be no harm in this. But what it should *be*, whether it were faithful to its ideal or not—on this everything would depend.

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF THE WORK OF AN ETHICAL SOCIETY[1]

HENRY SIDGWICK

I HAVE to ask you to regard this as a preliminary meeting of the new-formed Ethical Society, which will commence its ordinary meetings in the Michaelmas Term. This preliminary meeting is held with the view of arriving by frank discussion at a more full and clear notion of the aims and methods of such a society than could conveniently be given in the printed definition of its objects that has been circulated.

In order to set an example of frankness, I will begin by saying that I am not myself at all sanguine as to the permanent success of such a society in realising what I understand to be the design of its founders, *i.e.*, to promote through discussion the interests of practical morality. I think that failure in such an undertaking is more probable than success; but, lest this prognostication should be too depressing, I hasten to add that while permanent success in realising what we aim at would be a result as valuable as it would be remarkable, failure would be a very small evil ; indeed, it would not necessarily be an evil at all. Even supposing that we become convinced in the course of two or three years that we are not going to attain the end that we have in view by the method which we now propose to use, we might still feel—I have good hope that we shall feel—that our discussions, so far as they will have gone, will have been interesting and, in their way, profitable; though recognising that the time has come for the Ethical Society to cease, we may still feel glad that it has existed, and that we have belonged to it.

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[1] An address delivered at the preliminary meeting of the Cambridge Ethical Society, Friday, May 18th, 1888.

This cheerfully pessimistic view—if I may so describe it—is partly founded on an experience which I will briefly narrate.

Many years ago I became a member of a Metaphysical Society in London ; that was its name, although it dealt with ethical questions no less than those called metaphysical in a narrow sense. It included many recognised representatives of different schools of thought, who met animated, I am sure, by a sincere desire to pursue truth by the method of discussion ; and sought by frank explanation of their diverse positions and frank statement of mutual objections, to come, if possible, to some residuum of agreement on the great questions that concern man as a rational being—the meaning of human life, the relation of the individual to the universe, of the finite to the infinite, the ultimate ground of duty and essence of virtue. Well, for a little while the Society seemed to flourish amazingly; it was joined by men eminent in various departments of practical life—statesmen, lawyers, journalists, bishops and archbishops of the Anglican and of the Roman persuasion: and the discussions went on, monthly or thereabouts, among the members of this heterogeneous group, without any friction or awkwardness, in the most frank and amicable way. The social result was all that could be desired; but in a few years' time it became, I think, clear to all of us that the intellectual end which the Society had proposed to itself was not likely to be attained; that, speaking broadly, we all remained exactly where we were,

> "Affirming each his own philosophy,"

and no one being in the least convinced by any one else's arguments. And some of us felt that if the discussions went on, the reiterated statement of divergent opinions, the reiterated ineffective appeals to a common reason which we all assumed to exist, but which nowhere seemed to emerge into actuality, might become wearisome and wasteful of time. Thus the Metaphysical Society came to an end; but we were glad—at least, I certainly was glad—that we had belonged to it. We had not been convinced by each other, but we had learnt to understand each other better, and to sympathise, in a certain sense, with opposing lines of thought, even though we were unable to follow them with assent.

I have not, however, brought in this comparison merely to show why I am not afraid of failure; I have brought it in partly to introduce one counsel that I shall give to the Ethical Society with the view of escaping failure, viz., that it should be as much as possible *unlike* in its aims to the Metaphysical Society to which I have referred. I think we should give up altogether the idea of getting to the bottom of things, arriving at agreement on the first principles of duty or the Summum Bonum. If our discussions persist in taking that line, I can hardly doubt that we shall imitate the example of failure that I have just set before you; we shall not convince each other, and after a little while each of us, like the Irish juryman, will get tired of arguing with so many other obstinately unreasonable persons. In the Metaphysical Society we could not avoid this; a metaphysician who does not try to get to the bottom of things is, as Kant would say, an "Unding"; he had no *raison d'être.* But with our Ethical Society the case is different; the aim of such an Ethical Society, in the Aristotelian phrase, is not knowledge but action; and with this practical object it is not equally necessary that we should get to the bottom of things. It would be presumptuous to suppose that in such a Society as this, including, as we hope, many members whose intellectual habits as well as their aims are practical rather than speculative, we can settle the old controversies of the schools on ethical first principles; but it may be possible by steering clear of these controversies to reach some results of value for practical guidance and life. But how exactly are we to do this?

The question may be put in a more general form, in which it has a wider and more permanent interest than we can presume to claim for the special purpose for which we are met here to-night. What, we may ask, are the proper lines and limits of ethical discussions, having a distinctly practical aim, and carried on among a miscellaneous group of educated persons, who do not belong exclusively to any one religious sect or philosophical school, and possibly may not have gone through any systematic study of philosophy? The answer that I am about to give to this question must not be taken as in any way official, nor do I intend it be in any way cut and dried. I should like to be free to adopt a materially different view as the result of further experience and interchange of opinions. But at present the matter presents itself to me in this light. Moralists of all schools have acknowledged—and usually emphasised, each from his own point of view—that broad agreement in the details of morality which we actually find both among thoughtful persons who profoundly disagree on first principles, and among plain men who do not seriously trouble themselves about first principles. Well, my view is that we ought to start with this broad agreement as to the dictates of duty, and keeping close to it, without trying to penetrate to the ultimate grounds, the first principles on which duty may be constructed as a rational system, to make this general agreement somewhat more explicit and clear than it is in ordinary thought. I want to advance one or two degrees in the direction of systematising morality without hoping or attempting to go the whole way; and in the clearer apprehension of our common morality thus gained to eliminate or reduce the elements of confusion, of practical doubt and disagreement, which, at the present day at least, are liable to perplex even the plainest of plain men. I sometimes wonder whether the great Bishop Butler, who lays so much emphasis on the clearness and certainty of the dictates of a plain man's conscience—I wonder whether this generally cautious thinker would use quite the same language if he lived now. It certainly seems to me that the practical perplexities of the plain man have materially increased in the century and a half that have elapsed since the famous sermons to which I refer were preached. Take, *e.g.*, the case of compassion. The plain man of Butler's time knew that when he heard the cry of distress he ought to put his hand in his pocket and relieve it; but now he has learnt from newspapers and magazines that indiscriminate almsgiving aggravates in the long run the evils that it attempts to cure; and therefore now, when he hears the cry of woe, it is apt to stir in his mind a disagreeable doubt and conflict, instead of the old simple impulse. Well, there is a solution to this perplexity, on which thinkers of the most different schools and sects would probably agree; that true charity demands of us money, but also something more than money; personal service, sacrifice of time and thought, and—after all—a patient endurance of a partially unsatisfactory result, acquiescence in minimising evils that we cannot cure.

But this answer, though it does not raise any of the fundamental questions disputed in the schools, is yet not altogether trite and obvious; to give it in a fully satisfactory form needs careful thinking over, careful development and explanation. Thus this case may serve to illustrate my view of the general function of ethical debate, carried on by such a society as ours: to bring into a more clear and consistent form the broad and general agreement as to the particulars of morality which we find among moral persons, making explicit the general conceptions of the good and evil in human life, of the normal relation of a man to his fellows, which this agreement implies. We should do this not vaguely, but aiming cautiously at as much precision as the subject admits, not avoiding difficulties, but facing them, so as to get beyond the platitudes of copybook morality to results which may be really of use in the solution of practical questions; and yet not endeavouring to penetrate to ultimate principles, on which — as I have said — we can hardly hope to come to rational agreement in the present state of philosophical thought. We must remain as far as possible in the "region of middle axioms"—if I may be allowed the technical term.

But how shall we mark off this region of discussion, in which we look for middle axioms, from the region in which first principles are sought? Well, I shall not try to do this with any definite-ness, for if I did I should inevitably pass over into the region that I am trying to avoid; I should illustrate the old Greek argument to prove the necessity of philosophising. "We must philosophise, for either we ought to philosophise, or, if we ought not, we must philosophise in order to demonstrate that we ought not to philosophise." So if I tried to make definite our general conception of the kind of topics we ought to avoid, I should be insensibly drawn into a full discussion of these topics. I shall, therefore, leave the line vague, and content myself with describing some of the questions that lie beyond it.

To begin, there is all the discussion as to the nature, origin and development of moral ideas and sentiments, which—in recent times especially—has absorbed so large a part of the attention of moralists; when we want them to tell us what morality is, they are apt to slide off into entertaining but irrelevant speculations as to how, in pre-historic times, or in the obscurity of the infant's consciousness, it came to be. I think that, for our present purposes, we must keep clear of all this; we must say, with the German poet, "Wir, wir leben . . . und der lebende hat Recht." We must make as workable a system as we can of our own morality, taking it as we find it, with an inevitable element of imperfection and error which I hope posterity will correct and supplement, just as we have corrected and supplemented certain errors and deficiencies in the morality of preceding ages.

So again, I hope we shall not waste words on the question of the freedom of the will, so prominent in the writings of some moralists. I do not think that ought to be included among the problems of practical ethics. Whether, and in what sense, we could have realised in the past, or can realise in the future, the ideal of rational conduct which we have not realised, is not needed to be known for our present purposes. All we need to assume —and I suppose we may assume this of persons joining an Ethical Society—is that they have a desire of a certain force to realise their common moral ideal, and that they think it will help them to get their conception of it clearer.

And this leads me to another topic, more difficult to excise, but which yet I should like to omit. When we try to get the conception of rational conduct clear we come upon the "double nature of Good," which, as Bacon tells us, is "formed in everything"; we are met with the profound difficulty of harmonising the good of the individual with the good of the larger whole of which he is a part or member. In my professional treatment of ethics

I have concerned myself much with this question, —considering it to be the gravest formal defect of the Utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham, under whose influence my own view was formed, that it treats this problem so inadequately. But I do not want to introduce it into the discussions of our Society; I should prefer to assume—what I think we are all prepared to assume—that each of us wants to do what is best for the larger whole of which he is a part, and that it is not our business to supply him with egoistic reasons for doing it. In saying this, I do not dispute his claim to be supplied with such reasons by any moralist professing to construct a complete ethical system. When J. S. Mill says, in the peroration of a powerful address, "I do not attempt to stimulate you with the prospect of direct rewards, either earthly or heavenly; the less we think about being rewarded in either way the better for us," I think it is a hard saying, too hard for human nature. The demand that happiness shall be connected with virtue cannot be finally quelled in this way; but for the purposes of our Society I am ready to adopt, and should prefer to adopt, Mill's position.

And this leads me naturally to a point of very practical moment—the relation of our Society to the Christian Churches. For one great function of the religious teaching of the Churches—in all ages—has been the supply of extra-mundane motives stimulating men to the performance of duty. Such motives have been both of higher and lower kinds, appealing respectively to different elements of our nature—fears of hell-fire and outer darkness, of wailing and gnashing of teeth, for the brutal and selfish element in us, that can hardly be kept down without these coarse restraints; while to our higher part it has been shown how heavenly love in saints has fused into one the double nature of good; how—like earthly love in its moments of intensity—it has

> "Touched the chord of self that trembling passed in music out of sight."

Well, in all this—if my view be adopted—the Ethical Society will make no attempt to compete with the Churches. We shall contemplate the relation of virtue to the happiness of the virtuous agent, as we believe it actually to be in the present world, and not refer to any future world in which we may hope for compensation for the apparent injustices of the present. And in thus limiting ourselves to mundane motives we shall, I hope, keep a middle path between optimism and pessimism. That is, we shall not profess to prove that the apparent sacrifices of self-interest which duty imposes are never in the long run real sacrifices; nor, on the other hand, shall we ignore or underrate the noble and refined satisfactions which experience shows to attend the resolute choice of virtue in spite of all such sacrifices—

> "The stubborn thistles bursting
> Into glossy purples, which outredden
> All voluptuous garden-roses."

It may, however, be said that it is not merely the function of Churches to supply motives for the performance of duty, but also to teach what duty is, and that here their work must inevitably coincide—and perhaps clash—with that undertaken by an Ethical Society. My answer would be that there is at least a large region of secular duty in which thoughtful Christians commonly recognise that an ideal of conduct can be, and ought to be, worked out by the light of reason independently of revelation; and I should recommend our Society to confine its attention to this secular region. Here no doubt some of us may pursue the quest of moral truth by study or discussion in a non-religious spirit, others in a religious spirit; but I conceive that we have room for both. As a Society, I conceive that our attitude ought to be at once unexclusive as regards the non-religious, and unaggressive as regards all forms of Christian creed.

In saying this, I kept in view the difficulty that many feel in separating at all the ideas of morality and religion, and I have no wish to sharpen the distinction. Indeed, I myself can hardly conceive a working Ethical Society of which the aim would not include in essentials the apostle's definition of the pure service of religion. We might characterise it as the aim of being in the world and yet not of it, working strenuously for the improvement of mundane affairs, and yet keeping ourselves, as the apostle says, "unspotted of the world"—that is, in modern phrase, keeping clear of the compromises with sordid interests and vulgar ambitions which the practical standards of all classes and sections of society are too apt to admit. Of such compromises I will say a word presently: my point now is that the maintenance of an ideal in this sense unworldly must be the concern of any Ethical Society worthy of the name, nor do I see why those who habitually contemplate this ideal from a religious point of view should be unable to co-operate with those who habitually contemplate it from a purely ethical point of view. I do not say that there are no difficulties in such co-operation; but I am sure that we all bring with us a sincere desire to minimise these difficulties, and if so, I do not see why they should not be avoided or overcome.

To sum up: the region in which we are to move I conceive as, philosophically, a middle region, the place of intermediate ethical generalisations which we are content to conceive in a rough and approximate way, avoiding fundamental controversies as far as we can; while from a religious point of view it is a secular but not therefore irreligious region, in which we pursue merely mundane ends, but yet not in a worldly spirit.

But it remains to define more clearly its relation to particular practical problems. In the present age it is impossible that any group of educated persons, spontaneously constituted by their common interest in practical ethics, should not have their attention prominently drawn to the numerous schemes of social improvement on which philanthropic effort is being expended. In this way we may be easily led in our ethical discussions to debate one after another such practical questions as, "Shall we work for State-aided emigration, or promote recreative education, or try to put down sweating? Shall we spend our money in providing open spaces for the poor, or our leisure on a Charity Organisation Committee?" Now I have no doubt myself that persons of education, especially if they have comparative wealth and leisure, ought to interest themselves in some or all of these things; and I think it belongs to us in Cambridge, not only to diffuse a general conviction of the importance of this kind of work, but also to encourage a searching examination of the grounds on which particular schemes are urged on the public attention. But in this examination a detailed study of social facts necessarily comes in along with the study of principles, and—though I have no wish to draw a hard and fast line—I should be disposed to regard this study of facts as lying in the main beyond the province of our Society, whose attention should be rather concentrated on principles. I should propose to leave it to some economic or philanthropic association to examine how far an alleged social want exists, and how urgent it is, and by what particular methods it may best be satisfied or removed. What we have rather to consider is how far the eleemosynary or philanthropic intervention of private outsiders in such cases is in accordance with a sound general view of the relation of the individual to his society. It is with the general question, " What social classes owe to each other," that we are primarily concerned, though in trying to find the right answer to this question we may obtain useful instruction from a consideration of the particular fields of work to which I have referred.

But the moral problem offered by the social relations of different classes — though specially prominent in the thought of the present age—is not the only problem causing practical perplexities that such discussions as ours might reduce. There are many other such problems in our complicated modern life—even omitting those obviously unfit for public oral discussion. One class of them which specially interests me is presented by the divergence of the current practical standards of particular sections of the community, on certain points, from the common moral ideal which the community as a whole still maintains. We feel that such divergences are to a great extent an evil, the worldliness which we have to avoid; but yet we think them in some degree legitimate, and the difficulty lies in drawing the line. Any careful discussion of such deflections must lead to what bears the unpopular name of Casuistry. I think, however, that the odium which in the seventeenth century overwhelmed the systematic discussion by theologians of difficult and doubtful cases of morals—though undeniably in part deserved—went to an unreasonable length, and obscured the real importance of the study against which it was directed. There is no doubt that individuals are strongly tempted to have recourse to casuistry in order to find excuses for relaxing in their own favour the restraints of moral rules which they find inconvenient; and hence a casuist has come to be regarded with suspicion as a moralist who aims at providing his clients with the most plausible excuses available for this purpose. But though certain casuists have been reasonably suspected of this misapplication of their knowledge and ingenuity, the proper task of casuistry has always been quite different; the question with which it has properly been concerned is how far, in the particular circumstances of certain classes of persons, the common good demands a special interpretation or modification of some generally accepted moral rule. This, at any rate, is the kind of casuistical problem that I have now in view: and I think that any morality that refuses to deal with such problems must confess itself inadequate for the practical guidance of men engaged in the business of the world; since modifications of morality to meet the special needs of special classes are continually claimed, and more or less admitted by serious and well-meaning persons. Thus it is widely held that barristers must be allowed to urge persuasively for their clients considerations that they know to be false or misleading; that a clergyman may be a most virtuous man without exactly believing the creeds he says or the articles he signs; that a physiologist must be allowed to torture innocent animals; that a general in war must be allowed to use spies and at the same time to hang the spies of the conflicting general. I do not say that most educated persons would accept broadly all these relaxations, but that they would at least admit some of them more or less. Especially in the action of states or governments as such is this kind of divergence admitted, though vaguely and rather reluctantly. When Pope asked—using the names of two noted criminals:

> "Is it for Bond or Peter, paltry things,
> To pay their debts or keep their faith like kings?"

the epigram was undeniably deserved; still we do not commonly think that governments are bound to keep their faith quite like private individuals; we do not think that repudiating a treaty between nation and nation is quite like breaking a promise between man and man. On all these and similar points I think it would be of real practical utility if discussion could help us to clearer views. For there is a serious danger that when the need of such relaxations is once admitted they may be carried too far; that, in the esoteric morality of any particular profession or trade, ordinary morality will be put aside altogether on certain particular questions, as the opinion of ignorant outsiders; and no result could be more unfavourable than this to the promotion of ethical interests.

So far I have been speaking of particular and limited conflicts between what may be called sectional morality and general morality. But there are departments of society and life of which the relation to ethics is perplexing in a more broad and general way, just because of the elevated and ideal character of their aims—I mean art and science. The practical maxims of some classes of artists and scientific men are liable to collide with common morality in the manner just mentioned—*e.g.* certain painters or novelists may deliberately disregard the claims of sexual purity—but it is not of these limited conflicts that I now wish to speak, but of the perplexity one finds in fixing the general relation of the ends of Art and Science to moral ends. Perhaps it will be impossible to deal with this without falling into the metaphysical controversies that I have abjured; but the problem often presents itself to me entirely apart from the questions of the schools. When I surrender myself to the pursuit of truth or the impressions of art, I find myself in either case in a world absorbing and satisfying to my highest nature, in which, nevertheless, morality seems to occupy a very subordinate place, and in which—for the more effective realisation of the æsthetic or scientific ideal—it seems necessary that morality should be thus subordinated. The difficulty seems to be greater in the case of the æsthetic ideal, because the emotional conflict is greater. The lover of truth has to examine with neutral curiosity the bad and the good in this mixed world, in order to penetrate its laws; but he need not sympathise with the bad or in any way like its existence. But this is harder for the lover of beauty; since evil—even moral evil—is an element in the contrasts and combinations that give him the delight of beauty. If, as Renan says, such a career as Cæsar Borgia's is "beautiful as a tempest or an abyss," it is difficult for a lover of beauty not to rejoice that there was a Cæsar Borgia. One may even say that in proportion as the sentiment of beauty becomes absorbing and quasi-religious, this divergence from morality is liable to become more marked; because what is bad in a picturesque and exciting way comes to be more and more felt as discord artfully harmonised in the music that all things make to God.

Well, is this feeling in any degree legitimate? and if so, how is it to be reconciled with our moral aspirations? I do not expect to attain a single cogently-reasoned answer, which all must accept, to either of these questions. They will probably always be somewhat differently answered by different sets and schools of thoughtful persons. But I think they may illustrate the kind of questions on which we may hope to clear up our ideas and reduce the extent of our mutual disagreement by frank and sympathetic discussion.

[The limits above suggested were thought to be too narrow by the leading spirits of the London Ethical Society. Accordingly, as the reader will see, in the next address—delivered as President of the latter body—I tried to adapt my general view of the nature of the work that such a society might profitably undertake to a wider conception of its scope.]

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF AN ETHICAL SOCIETY[1]

HENRY SIDGWICK

IN taking this opportunity, which your committee has given me, of addressing the London Ethical Society, in the honourable but gravely responsible position of their president, I have thought that I could best fulfil the duties of my station by laying before you one or two difficulties which have occurred to my mind, in thinking how we are to realise the declared aims of our Society on the basis of its declared principles. I hope, indeed, not merely to put forward difficulties, but to offer at least a partial solution of them; but I am conscious that it is easier to raise questions than to settle them, and that there is a danger lest the effect of my remarks may be to repel some minds from the study which we are combined to promote. Still, after anxious thought, I have determined to face this danger. For I do not think we ought to conceal from ourselves that the task we have proposed to our Society is one of which the complete accomplishment is likely to be very difficult. Indeed, were it otherwise, it would hardly have been left for us to accomplish.

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[1] An address delivered to the London Ethical Society on April 23, 1893, and published in the *International Journal of Ethics*, October, 1893, under the title "My Station and its Duties."

I will begin by explaining that the difficulties of which I am to speak only affect a part of the aims and work of our Society; there is another part—and a most important part—which they do not affect. The first and most comprehensive of the aims that we have stated is

> "To assist individual and social efforts after right living."

Now, what are the obstacles to right living? Why does not each of us completely fulfil the duties of his station?

First, I put aside such obstacles as may seem to lie in external circumstances and material conditions. I do not mean that such circumstances and conditions may not *cause* the gravest hindrances to right living, which a Society like ours should make the most earnest efforts to remove. But important as it is to diminish these hindrances, it is no less important for an ethical society to lay stress on the old truth—sometimes apt to be overlooked in ardent efforts for economic improvement—that it is possible to act rightly under any material conditions. On this point I need hardly say that there is an overwhelming agreement among moralists. The ancient thinkers went too far, no doubt, in saying that a perfectly wise and good man would be perfectly happy in the extremest tortures. We moderns cannot go so far as that; but we must still maintain, as a cardinal and essential ethical truth, that a perfectly wise and good man could behave rightly even under these painful conditions. In short, the immediate obstacles to right conduct, however they may be caused, lie in our minds and hearts, not in our circumstances.

Looking closer at these obstacles, we find that they lie partly in the state of our intellect, partly in the state of our desires and will. Partly we know our duty imperfectly, partly our motives for acting up to what we know are not strong enough to prevail over our inclination to do something else. The two kinds of obstacles are essentially different, and must be dealt with by different methods; each method has its own problems, and the problems require very different treatment. In what I am to say to-day I shall treat mainly of the intellectual obstacles—the imperfection of knowledge. But before I proceed to this I will illustrate the manner in which the two obstacles are combined, by recalling an anecdote from the early history of ethics. It is told of Socrates that he once met a professional teacher of Wisdom, who informed him that he had discovered the true definition of Justice. "Indeed," said Socrates, "than we shall have no more disputes among citizens about rights and wrongs, no more fights of civic factions, no more quarrels and wars between nations. It is, indeed, a most magnificent discovery!"

Now, the first impression that this remark makes on us is that Socrates is speaking ironically, as no doubt he partly is. We know that men and nations continually commit injustice knowingly; we remember the old fable of the wolf and the lamb—where the wolf pleads his own cause, and then pronounces and immediately executes sentence of capital punishment on the weaker animal—and we surmise that the practical result of this famous debate would not have been altered by our supplying the wolf with the clearest possible formula of justice; the argument might have been cut short, but it would have been all the same in the end to the lamb.

But let us look at the matter again, and we shall see that the master's meaning is not entirely ironical.

Let us suppose that our notion of justice suddenly became so clear that in every conflict that is now going on between individuals and classes and nations every instructed person could at once see what justice required with the same absolute certainty and exactness with which a mathematician can now see the answer to a problem in arithmetic; so that if might anywhere overbore right, it would have to be mere naked brutal force, without a rag of moral excuse to hide its nakedness; suppose this, and I think we see at once that though all the injustice in the world would not come to an end—since there is a good deal of the wolf still left in man—yet undoubtedly there would be much less injustice; we should still want policemen and soldiers, but we should have much less occasion for their services.

Now, let us make a different supposition: let us suppose the state of our knowledge about justice unchanged, but all the obstacles on the side of motive removed; let us suppose that men's ideas of their rights are still as confused and conflicting as they are now, but that every one is filled with a predominant desire to realise justice, strong enough to prevail over every opposing inclination. Here again we must admit that we should not thus get rid of injustice altogether. I am afraid that it would still be true, as the poet says, that

"New and old, disastrous feud,
Must ever shock like armed foes,"

and we must still look to have serious and even sanguinary conflicts between nations and parties, conscientiously inscribing on their banners conflicting principles of Right. But though unintentional injustice of the gravest kind might still be done, what a relief it would be to humanity to have got rid of all intended wrong; and how much nobler, less exasperating, more chivalrous, would be the conflicts that still had to go on, if each combatant knew that his adversary was fighting with perfect rectitude of purpose.

I have laid stress on this comparison of imaginary improvements, because I think that those who are earnestly concerned for the moral amelioration of themselves and others are often apt to attend too exclusively to one or other of the two sets of obstacles that I have distinguished. They are either impressed with the evils of moral ignorance, and think that if anyone really *knew* what the good life was, he must live it; or, what is more common, they are too exclusively occupied with the defects of desire and will, and inclined to say that anyone knows his duty well enough if he would only act up to his knowledge. Now, I hope we shall agree that an ethical society worthy of the name must aim at removing both kinds of defects; success in both endeavours is necessary for the complete accomplishment of our task; but as success in either is difficult, it may encourage us somewhat to think how much would be gained by success in only one of these endeavours, even if the other is supposed to fail altogether. In the education of the young and in the practical work of our Society the aim of developing the motives to right action, of intensifying the desire for the good life, must always be prominent. This endeavour has its own difficulties and dangers of failure, and I do not propose to deal with them to-day. But before I pass on to my special subject—the other endeavour to remove the defects of moral knowledge—may I say one thing, out of my observation of human life, as to the endeavour I leave on one side? Though the gift of inspiring enthusiasm for duty and virtue is like other gifts, very unequally distributed among well-meaning persons, I do not believe that anyone who had himself an ardent love of goodness ever failed entirely to communicate it to others. He may fail in his particular aims, he may use ill-devised methods, meet with inexplicable disappointments, make mistakes which cause him bitter regret; but we shall find that after all, though the methods may have failed, the man has succeeded ; somewhere, somehow, in some valuable degree, he has—if I may use an old classical image—handed on the torch of his own ardour to others who will run the race for the prize of virtue.

We are agreed, then, that much may be done if we simply take the current ideal of what is right, and earnestly endeavour to develop a desire to realise it in ourselves and others. But this is not the whole of our aim. We are conscious of defects in this current ideal, and it is impossible for us really to care for it and at the same time to sit down content with these defects. Hence we state it as our second aim "to free the current ideal of what is right from all that is merely traditional and self-contradictory, and thus to widen and perfect it."

With this view we invite all our members "to assist in constructing a Theory or Science of Right, which, starting with the reality and validity of moral distinctions, shall explain their mental and social origin, and connect them in a logical system of thought."

It is to the difficulties involved in the task thus defined that my thoughts have chiefly turned in meditating what I was to say to you to-day.

I think that no instructed person can regard it as other than arduous. Speaking broadly, what we propose to do is what ancient thinkers had been trying to do for many centuries, before the Christian Churches monopolised the work of moralising mankind in this quarter of the globe; and it is also what a long line of modern thinkers have been trying to do for several centuries more, since independent ethical thought revived in Europe, after the long mediæval period of submission to ecclesiastical authority.

Yet the phrase we use—"assist in constructing"—implies that after all these efforts the construction yet remains to be effected. We must, then, hardly be surprised if we do not find it easy.

Still there is a Greek proverb that says "the fine things are difficult," and I by no means wish to say a word to dissuade anyone from devoting his energies to so noble a cause, especially since a large part of my own life has been spent in working for this end.

And in order that I may be as little discouraging as possible, I will begin with a difficulty which seems to me sufficiently important to be worth discussing, but which I hope to be able to remove completely.

At first sight it might seem as if the task that we have undertaken, the task of "explaining the mental and social origin of moral distinctions, and connecting them in a logical system of thought," was one that could only be carried out by experts—*i.e.*, by persons who have gone through a thorough training in psychology, sociology, and logic—in short, by philosophers. But the plan on which our Society has been framed—and I believe the same is true of all other ethical societies which have been founded—invites the co-operation of all thoughtful persons who sympathise with its principles and aims, whether they are experts in psychology or sociology or not. And if our movement succeeds, the element of non-experts is evidently likely largely to outnumber the experts, unless the philosophers of the community should increase in number more than is to be expected, or perhaps even desired.

The question then arises, can this unphilosophic majority really aid in the task of constructing a Theory of Right which shall eliminate error and contradiction from current morality, reduce all valid moral perceptions and judgments to their elements or first principles, and present them as connected in a logical system of thought? Ought we not, at least, to divide and distribute our task more clearly and thoroughly? Does not our invitation at present seem to hand over a work of intellectual construction, requiring the highest gifts, and the completest training, to persons who are not, and who cannot be expected to become, duly qualified for the work? Will not these untrained builders build with untempered mortar?

I have stated this difficulty plainly, because I at first felt it strongly myself, and therefore think that others may have felt it. But reflection convinced me that if your Society has been right—and I hope experience may show that it has been right—in undertaking the noble but arduous task which it has proposed to itself, there is much to be said for the broad and comprehensive basis which it has adopted. There are serious reasons for thinking that the work undertaken cannot be thoroughly well done by philosophers alone; partly because alone they are not likely to have the requisite knowledge of facts; and partly because their moral judgment on any particular question of duty, even supposing them to have obtained all available information as to the particular facts of the case, is not altogether to be trusted, unless it is aided, checked, and controlled by the moral judgment of persons with less philosophy but more special experience.

First, as I say, the philosopher's knowledge is likely to be inadequate for the accomplishment of our aim. Our aim is to frame an ideal of the good life for humanity as a whole, and not only for some particular section; and to do this satisfactorily and completely we must have adequate knowledge of the conditions of this life in all the bewildering complexity and variety in which it is actually being lived. This necessity is imposed on us by the modern ethical ideal which our Western civilisation owes to Christianity. We cannot any longer decline—as Aristotle would have declined—to work out an ideal of good life for mechanics and tradesmen, on the ground that such persons are incapable of any high degree of virtue. But if we are to frame an ideal of good life for all, and to show how a unity of moral spirit and principle may manifest itself through the diversity of actions and forbearances, efforts and endurances, which the diversity of social functions renders necessary—we can only do this by a comprehensive and varied knowledge of the actual opportunities and limitations, the actual needs and temptations, the actually constraining customs and habits, desires and fears, of all the different species of that "general man" who, as Browning says, "receives life in parts to live in a whole." And this knowledge a philosopher—whose personal experience is often very limited—cannot adequately attain unless he earnestly avails himself of opportunities of learning from the experience of men of other callings.

But, secondly, even supposing him to have used these opportunities to the full, the philosopher's practical judgment on particular problems of duty is liable to be untrustworthy, unless it is aided and controlled by the practical judgment of others who are not philosophers. This may seem to some a paradox. It may be thought that so far as a philosopher has a sound general theory of right, he must be able to apply it to determine the duties of any particular station in life, if he has taken due pains to inform himself as to that station and its circumstances. And this would doubtless be true if his information could be made complete; but this it cannot be. He can only learn from others the facts which they have consciously observed and remembered; but there is an important element in the experience of themselves and their predecessors—the continuous experience of social generations—which finds no place in any statement of facts or reasoned forecast of consequences that they could furnish; it is only represented in their judgments as to what ought to be done and aimed at. Hence it is a common observation that the judgments of practical men as to what ought to be done in particular circumstances are often far sounder than the reasons they give for them; the judgments represent the result of experience unconsciously as well as consciously imbibed; the reasons have to be drawn from that more limited part of experience which has been the subject of conscious observation, information, and memory. This is why a moral philosopher, in my opinion, should always study with reverent care and patience what I am accustomed to call the Morality of Common Sense. By this I do not mean the morality of "the world" —*i.e.*, the moral notions and judgments of persons who are not seriously concerned about their moral duty—who are always perhaps in a majority. Such persons, indeed, have a morality, and it is better than their actions; they approve rules which they do not carry out, and admire virtues which they do not imitate. Still, taking the morality of the worldly at its best, it would be wasted labour to try to construct it into a consistent system of thought; what there is in it of wisdom and truth is too much intermixed with a baser element, resulting from want of singleness of heart and aim in those whose thoughts it represents. What the worldly really want—if I may speak plainly—is not simply to realise the good life in virtue of its supreme worth to humanity, but to realise it as much as they can while keeping terms with all their appetites and passions, their sordid interests and vulgar ambitions. The morality that the world works out in different ages and countries and different sections of society, under the influence of the spirit of compromise, is not without interest for the historian and the sociologist; but it was not to this mixed stuff that I just now referred when I said that the moral philosopher should study with reverent and patient care the Morality of Common Sense. I referred to the moral judgments —and especially the spontaneous unreflected judgments on particular cases, which are sometimes called moral intuitions—of those persons, to be found in all walks and stations of life, whose earnest and predominant aim is to do their duty; of whom it may be said that

> " though they slip and fall,
> They do not blind their souls with clay,"

but after each lapse and failure recover and renew their rectitude of purpose and their sense of the supreme value of goodness. Such persons are to be found, not alone or chiefly in hermitages and retreats —if there are still any hermitages and retreats—but in the thick and heat of the struggle of active life, in all stations and ranks, in the Churches and outside the Churches. It is to them we have appealed for aid and sympathy in the great task that we have undertaken; and it is to their judgments on the duties of their station, in whatever station they may be found, that the moral philosopher should, as I have said, give reverent attention, in order that he may be aided and controlled by them in his theoretical construction of the Science of Right.

Perhaps some of my audience may think that in what I have just been saying I have been labouring the wrong point ; that it needs no argument to show that the moral philosopher, if he tries to work out a reasoned theory of duty by which all the particular duties of particular stations may find their places in one harmonious and coherent system, cannot dispense with the aid and guidance of the special moral experience of practical men ; but that what requires to be proved is rather that the practical man, who desires earnestly to know and fulfil the particular duties of his particular station, has any need of the philosopher. And certainly I must admit that there is a widespread opinion, supported by moralists of great repute, that he has hardly any such need ; that, as Butler says, "any plain honest man in almost any circumstances, if, before he engages in any course of action, he asks himself, 'Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong?' would answer the question agreeably to truth and virtue." Or if it be granted that such a plain honest man has any need of philosophers, it is said to be only to protect him against other philosophers; it is because there are bad philosophers—what we call sophists—about, endeavouring to undermine and confuse the plain man's naturally clear notions of duty, that there has come to be some need of right-minded thinkers to expose the sophistries and dispel the confusions. It is held, in short, that if any assistance can be obtained from the moral philosopher by a plain man who is making serious efforts after right living, it is not the positive kind of assistance which a physician gives to those who consult him for rules of diet, but a merely negative assistance, such as the policeman gives who warns suspicious characters off the premises.

This view is so often put forward that I cannot but infer that it is really very widely entertained, and that it corresponds to the moral experience of many persons; that many plain honest men really do think that they always know what their duty is—at any rate, if they take care not to confuse their moral sense by bad philosophy. In my opinion such persons are, to some extent, under an illusion, and really know less than they think. But whether I could convince them of this, or whether, if I could convince them, it would be really for their advantage, are questions which I need not now consider, because I think it hardly likely that such persons have joined our Ethical Society in any considerable numbers. For to practical men of this stamp the construction of a theory or science of right must seem a work of purely speculative interest, having no particular value whatever; a work, therefore, which persons who have not studied psychology or sociology had better leave to those who profess these subjects. It is not to plain men of this type that our appeal is made, but rather to those whose reflection has made them aware that in their individual efforts after right living they have often to grope and stumble along an imperfectly-lighted path; whose experience has shown them uncertainty, confusion, and contradiction in the current ideal of what is right, and has thus led them to surmise that it may be liable to limitations and imperfections, even when it appears clear and definite. Practical men of this stamp will recognise that the effort to construct a Theory of Right is not a matter of mere speculative interest, but of the deepest practical import; and they will no more try to dispense with the aid of philosophy than the moral philosopher—if he knows his own limitations—will try to dispense with the aid of moral common sense.

Well, may I say that here is one difficulty removed? But I am afraid that removing it only brings another into view. We have seen how and why philosophers are to co-operate with earnest and thoughtful persons who are not philosophers in constructing an ethical system; but the discussion has made it evident that the main business of construction and explanation—on the basis of psychology and sociology—must be thrown on the philosophers;

and then the question arises, how are they to co-operate among themselves? The reason why the work remains to be done lies in the fundamental disagreement that has hitherto existed among philosophers as to the principles and method of ethical construction; and so long as this disagreement continues, how is co-operation possible? Well, I think it may be said on the hopeful side, that there is more willingness now to co-operate than there has been in other times not very remote. Fundamental disagreements on principles and methods can only be removed by systematic controversy; but it was difficult to conduct philosophical controversy in a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation, so long as philosophers had the bad habit of arguing in as exasperated a tone as if each had suffered a personal injury through the publication of views opposed to his own. This bad habit has now nearly passed away, and a glance at the names of our committee will show that moralists of the most diverse philosophical schools are willing to combine in the work of an ethical society. But this willingness does not altogether remove the difficulty, or rather it removes it as regards a part of our aims, but not as regards another part. It is easy to see how philosophers of diverse schools may, by sympathetic efforts at mutual understanding and interpenetration of ideas, assist each other in constructing a theory or science of right; but even under these favourable conditions the labour of this construction is likely to be long, and how, in the meantime—so long as their fundamental disagreements are unremoved—can they effectually combine to assist individual and social efforts after right living? So long as they are not agreed on the ultimate end of action—so long as one holds it to be moral perfection, another "general happiness," another "efficiency of the social organism"—how can any counsels they may combine to give, as to the right way of living so as best to realise the end, be other than discordant and bewildering to those who seek their counsels? The difficulty would be avoided if all the philosophers of the Ethical Society belonged to the same school, for then they could assist those who were not philosophers by reasoned deductions from the accepted principles of the school. They would have to admit that other philosophers held fundamentally different principles, but they would explain to their hearers that the other philosophers were wrong. But, then, if our movement flourished and was found to meet a social need, these other philosophers would be led to form ethical societies of their own. The non-philosophic members of the different societies could not be thoroughly competent judges of the philosophical disputes; but loyalty and *esprit de corps* would lead them to stand firmly by their respective philosophers; and the result must be that any assistance rendered by these competing ethical societies to individual and social efforts after right living would be hampered by the grave drawbacks of sectarian rivalries and conflicts. In short, it seemed to me that the ethical movement was in a dilemma; if each school had its own ethical society, it incurred the dangers of sectarianism; if different schools combined to work in the same society, it incurred the danger of a bewildering discord of counsels.

In this perplexing choice of alternatives, I think that our Society has adopted the right course in accepting the difficulty that attaches to combined efforts; and I think that if this difficulty is contemplated fairly and considerately, though we cannot completely remove it, we can find a provisional solution of it sufficient for practical purposes.

I find this solution in the generally-admitted fact, that there is much greater agreement among thoughtful persons on the question what a good life is, than on the question why it is good. When they are trying to define the ultimate end of right actions, the conceptions they respectively apply seem to be so widely divergent that the utmost efforts of mutual criticism are hardly sufficient to enable them even to understand each other. But, when from the effort to define the ultimate end of right conduct, we pass to discuss right conduct itself, whether viewed on its inner or its outer side—the spirit in which a good life is to be lived, the habits of thought and feeling that it requires, the external manifestations of this inner rectitude in the performance of duty and the realisation of virtue—then the disagreement is reduced to a surprising extent. I do not say that it becomes insignificant, but there is no important difference of opinion among philosophers as to the details and particulars of morality. Were this so, the task of an ethical society would be less arduous than I have felt bound to represent it; but it is at any rate not sufficient to prevent a broad, substantial agreement as to the practical ideal of a good life. And I think that philosophers of the most diverse schools may combine on the basis of this broad and general agreement with each other, and with earnest and thoughtful persons who are not philosophers in their practical ideals; and, letting their fundamental differences on ultimate principles drop into the background, may hopefully co-operate in efforts to realise the second of our aims, to free this current ideal from all that is merely traditional and self-contradictory, and thus to widen and perfect it.

But I am afraid you will think that our task, as I conceive it, is like the climbing of a mountain, of which the peaks are hidden one after another behind lower peaks; for when one difficulty is surmounted it brings another into view. We have agreed that our business is to "free the current ideal of what is right from all that is merely traditional"; but we are also agreed—it is one of our express principles—that the good life "is to be realised by accepting and acting in the spirit of such common obligations as are enjoined by the relationships of family and society." But when we look closer at these common obligations, we find that they are actually determined by tradition and custom to so great an extent that, if we subtracted the traditional element, it would be very difficult to say what the spirit of the obligation was. This is not perhaps clear at first sight, because the moral tradition, familiar to us from childhood upward, blends itself so completely with our conception of the facts that it seems to the unreflecting mind to arise out of them naturally and inevitably; but if we take any such common obligation and compare the different conceptions of it as we find them in different ages and countries, the large space occupied by the traditional element becomes clear through the great range of its variations. Take, for instance, the family relations. As we trace these down the stream of time we see them undergoing remarkable changes, both in extent and content. The mutual claims of kindred more remote than the descendants of the same parents or grandparents, which in primitive times are strong and important, become feeble and evanescent as civilisation goes on; while within the narrower circle, within which the tie still remains strong, the element of authority on the one hand and of obedience on the other—authority of husbands over wives and parents over children—is subject to a similar, though not an equal, diminution; on the other hand, the interference of the State in the domestic control and provision for children's welfare, which was at first left entirely to parents, is a marked feature of recent social progress. During the whole of this process of historic change the recognised mutual obligations of members of the family have been determined by the actual state of traditional morality at any given time; when, then, from this historic survey we turn to scrutinise our own ideal of family duty, how are we to tell how much of it belongs to mere tradition, which the river of progress will sweep away, and how much belongs to the indestructible conditions of the well-being of life, propagated as human life must be propagated? And the same may be said when we pass from domestic to social and political relations: what social classes owe to each other, according to our commonly-accepted ideal of morality, depends on traditions which result from a gradual development, are going through a process of change, and are actually assailed by doubts and controversies often of a deep and far-reaching kind. How can we find in this moving, though slowly moving, mass of traditional rules and sentiments, which is the element in which our outward moral life is necessarily lived, any stable foundation on which to build, and to invite others to build, the structure of a good life? And yet, on the other hand, we have pledged ourselves not to acquiesce in "mere tradition" when recognised as such, for which indeed we can hardly feel, or hope to inspire, any enthusiasm.

Of this difficulty there is, I think, no complete solution possible, until our task of constructing a theory or science of Right has been satisfactorily accomplished; but some suggestions may be made, helpful towards the provisional solution which we practically require, and with these I will now briefly conclude.

First, the same historic survey which shows us the process of continual change through which human morality has passed also shows us that,—like the structures of physical organisms,—it tends to be continually adapted, in a subtle and complex manner, to the changing conditions and exigencies of human society. This tendency does not, indeed, suffice to place traditional morality above criticism; since we have no ground for regarding its adaptation to social needs as being at any time perfect, and critical discussion is an indispensable means of improving it. But a contemplation of the profoundly important part played by morality, as it changes and develops along with other elements in the complex fact of social evolution, should make our critical handling of it respectful and delicate, and should quell that temper of rebellion against tradition and convention, into which the reflective mind is apt to fall, in the first reaction against the belief in the absolute validity of current and accepted rules.

Secondly, though the traditional and conventional element of current morality cannot belong to our moral ideal as abstractly contemplated, it may none the less incontrovertibly claim a place in the concrete application of that ideal to present facts. For instance, a refined sense of justice will require us to fulfil the expectations warranted by any implied and tacit understandings into which we may have entered, no less than those which depend on express and definite contracts: and the implied and mutually-understood conditions of our voluntary social relations are in most cases largely determined by tradition and custom. On the other hand, if in reflecting on the morality of our age we find it to contain palpable inconsistencies; if accepted particular rules cannot be reconciled with equally accepted general principles, or tolerated practices reconciled with accepted rules; if there is an arbitrary inequality, based on no rational grounds, in the commonly approved treatment of human beings; if, to take a simple case, we find that we can find no real moral distinction between conduct which we have judged legitimate on our own part towards others and conduct which we have judged illegitimate on the part of others towards us—then in such inconsistencies we may recognise a sure sign of error and need of change in our ethical view.

Thirdly, in considering difficulties of detail we should never lose grasp of the importance of that rectitude of purpose, that mental attitude and habit of devotion to universal good, which constitutes the core and centre of the good life. Whatever else shifts, as life and thought changes, this central element is stable and its moral value indestructible; and it not only consoles us to rest on this certitude when practical doubts and perplexities assail us, but it may sometimes afford a solution of these doubts. It is, indeed, a dangerous error to hold that it does not matter what we do so long as we do it in the right spirit. But though a dangerous error, it is still only an exaggeration of the truth; for there are many cases where it really does not matter very much to ourselves or to others which of two alternative courses we adopt, so long as we take whichever we do take in a spirit of sincere devotion to the general good, and carry it through in the manner and mood of thought and feeling which belong to this spirit.

Further, we may make this old and abstract conception of the general good more full and definite by combining it with the more modern conception of society as an organism: in which each individual worker in any trade or profession is to be regarded as a member of an organ, having his share of responsibility for the action of this organ. We shall thus recognise that the right condition of any such organ depends on the service it renders to the whole organism; so that if the accepted moral rules and sentiments of any such social class are seen to tend to the benefit of the part at the expense of the whole they stand condemned. It does not follow that the rules should be at once set aside—as this might cause a greater evil in the way of disappointment and disturbance—but we must recognise the need of change and begin the process. Similarly, if we find that elements of human good, such as knowledge and art, important in the life of the whole, are not sufficiently recognised in our current moral ideal, the same principle will require us to enlarge and extend this ideal to admit them.

And if it be said that after all is done the moral ideal of our age, however purged of inconsistencies and inspired and expanded by a steady self-devotion to the most comprehensive notion of good that we can form, is still imperfect and mutable; and that it must be expected to undergo, in the future, transformations now unforeseen; it yet need not painfully disturb us that the best of our possessions should be thus subject to the inexorable conditions of mundane existence. It need not hinder us from cherishing and holding to the best we have so long as it remains the best. Life is essentially change, and the good life must be essentially life; it is enough if it contain unchanged amid the change that aspiration after the best life, which is itself a chief source and spring of change.

ETHICS AND THEOLOGY

G. VON GIŻYCKI

EVEN in these days one often hears it said that theology is the basis of morality. If this were true, we might well be apprehensive for the future of the human race : for it is a fact that theological belief in all civilised societies is diminishing in proportion as the sciences advance. But the whole of ethical investigation has exhibited the groundlessness of the statement that morality rests upon theology : we do not anywhere find it necessary to bring the doctrine of theology to the support of the propositions of morality. But let us look away from this proof, and subject the doctrine of the independence of ethics to a more special and searching proof.

We hear men say that morality is based upon religion. What does "morality" mean here, and what "religion"? We cannot well be mistaken if we say that by morality is understood conscientious, just conduct, and by religion belief in a personal God and in the immortality of the soul. Therefore, the statement we are to examine declares, if we are to give it a clear and definite meaning: Conscientious, upright conduct rests on a belief in a personal God, and in the immortality of the soul.

It may well be admitted, since the research of Hume and Kant, and it is generally conceded in the scientific world, that the existence of a personal God and the immortality of the soul cannot be proved. But let us for the present start with the supposition that a higher personal being exists who has our fate in his power, and has given us certain commandments. Still, the question will even then arise, why ought we to carry out these, his commandments?

If some powerful tyrant commands a man to do this or that, something perhaps against the man's conscience, if the tyrant promises rich reward in case his order be fulfilled, and threatens fearful torture if it be disregarded, is obedience moral? Is slavish fear before a mighty tyrant something noble and good? "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me," is what, according to the Bible, the tempter said to the Son of Man. Would the worship of the devil be a moral act? Now, why is it represented as a bad thing to follow the will of Satan, and as good to follow the will of God? Simply because Satan is bad and God is good. Not because God is a powerful being, who has our weal or woe in his hands, is it right to obey his word; for the devil is also regarded to be such a being, and every unworthy despot is one who has power over men, and can cause them misery; it is not held to be a virtue to submit one's self to a powerful wicked being; but because God is good it is right to obey his will—because God commands what is right, God's will is *good:* but what does this mean? We evidently intend by it to define more closely the divine will. When we praise God on account of his justice, goodness, and wisdom, we wish to declare certain characteristics of him: in so doing, we admit that they signify something of themselves, for otherwise we use words without sense. "If one attaches no meaning to the words 'good,' and 'just,' and 'right,'" says Archbishop Whately, "except that such is the divine command, then to say that God is good, and his commands just, is only saying in a circuitous way that he is what he is, and that what he wills, he wills, which might equally be said of any being in the universe."

If it is to be good, if it is to be a matter of duty, and not simply of selfish shrewdness, to obey God's will, then God must be good, then his will must be directed toward the good; and this, again, presupposes that the good is something in itself without reference to the fact that God wills it. What makes that personal ruler of the world, in which the believer trusts, a divinity and not an Ahriman, is, in a word, his moral qualities. And whosoever denies that these in themselves have a meaning, robs God of his moral attributes. We must already have recognised moral distinctions if we are to declare God to be good, and to assert that it is moral to obey him.

In a civilised community believers generally admit that it means something in and of itself, to designate anything as right and good. They boast of the pure morality of their religion when they compare it with other religions; and, in so far, they submit the various religions to the moral standard as to a supreme judge. And especially, if we turn to the Christian gospel, we shall find that it already presupposes moral distinctions in general, and only urges the carrying out of the rules of right. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

But while it may be conceded that some acts are good or bad independently of God's will, and that the bad ones of this class are not bad because they are forbidden, but are forbidden because they are bad, still it may be contended that other acts are bad only because God orders or forbids them. This distinction, however, is untenable.

The upright man follows a divine command, the goodness and wisdom of which he does not perceive, because he is convinced that God, the all-perfect being, could command only what is wise and good. From God's moral attributes in general he infers the morality of this single command, just as from the character of a wise and good man whom he knows he infers that any special precept which this man follows must be wise and good, although he may not see its wisdom. In the one case, as in the other, he believes that reasons which would justify the precept are at hand, if one but had the necessary insight to find them out.

One of the most important facts which historic study has secured is that the earliest religions do not stand in any relation to morality; originally the gods maintained an attitude of indifference toward the moral side of human conduct. The moral ideas have developed in the social life of man, and in it have their roots: only afterwards and gradually were they set up into connection with the gods. This one circumstance proves that morality is independent of theology. Even Christian theologians have brought it forward as something remarkable that men who were capable through pure reason of determining the essence of virtue, as is to be seen in the heathen systems of ethics, were nevertheless not led to recognise the practice of virtue as the surest means of pleasing the gods, but have regarded as the surest, such actions as had no moral worth or were positively corrupt. Morality was just that which transformed the religious ideas. How often the gods stood on a lower moral level than the men of the time who were most respected for their character! Flattering names which were given the gods in order not to offend them, such as the most just, the most holy, must not mislead us, as it all depends upon what was really believed to be the doings of the gods. Men have often had great difficulty in improving the morals of the gods whom they have inherited from their cruder forefathers.

And since morality does not have its root in theological beliefs, it is not remarkable that the greatest differences of morality and immorality are found along with the same religious ideas, and that on the other hand the same moral ideas and the same grades of morality exist alongside of very different, even hostile, religions.

But let us turn away once for all from these objections to the supposition that morality rests on God's will, and ask ourselves: How are we, even after we accept his will as the basis, to find out what his will is?

That God does not now speak directly to us is quite generally conceded, therefore there are only two ways of discovering his will: we must try to find it out by observing nature and ourselves, or else we must fall back upon a supernatural revelation. And at present we must bring before our attention only the second, which is taken for granted in all widely-spread religions.

In considering the idea of a supernatural revelation we must not forget that to-day even many believers in God deny the possibility, or the actuality, or the conceivability of such a thing, and therefore stand outside the circle of those for whom a system of ethics built upon revelation has weight.

But let us then admit that God's will has been declared in a supernatural revelation. And immediately the question arises: in which? for, as a matter of fact, there are many religious proclamations set up as revelations. A higher principle is needed; this, therefore, must be based on something else. Bishop Cumberland said: "The surest and often the only sign that a law is of God, is that the execution of it furthers the happiness of mankind; only on this ground could it be declared of a God that his essence was love." But if we have once found such a principle as the happiness of mankind, we can derive from it all the rules of morality, and do not any longer need a revelation.

To this must be added that there have been delivered to us not one group of holy scripture unchanged through the centuries, always and everywhere recognised as authority ; but that theologians have been of various opinions as to the genuineness of many passages and of whole books. Ought we not to make morality independent of what decision critics may come to as to the text of a book ?

Men have often admitted that God's will is not a principle of morality in the sense that out of it could be derived the contents of moral precepts. We must first know what is right, in order to know what his will is ; as we only know that God wills the right. But men have maintained that the divine will is still an indispensable foundation for morality, inasmuch as it alone inspires us with motives to carry out, in our conduct, that which in another way we have recognised as right and good.

But what kinds of motives, then, are these to be? Why should we, through the thought that God wills it, be induced to do what is right? Because in the midst of the dangers and temptations of this life, in order to keep ourselves in the path of duty, we need the prospect of eternal life which God has promised those who believe on him and do his commandments. This is the answer which is generally given us by believers. As is often the case, it is intended by this answer to express the idea that man is capable of doing his duty only for the sake of reward, only out of self-interest; at the bottom of it lies a low selfish conception of what is moral, which is in contradiction to the convictions of many of the noblest and best men, who believe that in its very essence virtue is disinterested, and not only an affair of far-sighted shrewdness. This religious virtue which craves a reward, and accordingly which looks upon conscientiousness as a burden that a man might hope to throw away after his death, is degraded and unworthy.

A glance suffices, however, to disprove the doctrine that man can be induced to do right only out of hope of future reward, and fear of future punishment. We know that one of the best of men, Socrates, was in doubt as to the continuance of life after death. Aristotle and Spinoza did not believe in immortality, in the sense in which the Christian understands it, and Frederic the Great, Lichtenberg, Hume, and Bentham, believed that death was the absolute end of all life. And these men were great and good. But, in truth, countless men and women are of the conviction that the obligation to do right is direct and immediate, and does not come through the roundabout way of heaven and hell, and that for the sake of men, men are to abstain from all wilful injury and to do good; not for God's sake, not for a future reward, or to avoid future punishment. "Whence," says Maudsley, "were drawn in the past the inspirations of the sublimest deeds of heroism and of self-sacrifice even to the laying down of life? Not from supernatural but from natural sources. Not from any expectation of recompense in a future life, but as a simple act of pagan devotion to country or to kind, and oftentimes in the calm assurance that the sacrifice was the end of all, was the supreme sacrifice made by patriot or by hero; and we may be sure that in time to come, whatever views may be entertained of the supernatural, mankind will continue to find within itself the natural sources of the like fanatical inspirations."

The influence of belief in immortality upon the conduct of man has often been over-estimated, inasmuch as perspective in time has not been borne in mind. In proportion as a condition of pain or joy appears distant, an impression which the idea of it makes upon the feelings is weak. And this general fact holds good in an especially high degree in the case of those who most need a strengthening of their moral impulses; furthermore it is exactly such persons who are disposed to regard the observance of outward forms of worship as the best way to save their souls. Surely the worth of religion as a supplement to human laws, a shrewd kind of police force, a deputy of the detective, is not very high. If we observe the conduct of believers under circumstances where the commandments of religion are not supported by the civil laws and public opinion, or where, as for example in respect to duelling in many states, the social contradicts the religious sanction, we perceive that with many believers the religious motive is weak and helpless.

But if the conceptions of heaven and hell really make a strong impression upon a man's feelings, they could easily produce a selfish kind of disposition; personal interest is with many believers the ruling motive; although they do not hope in this world, but in another, to receive their reward, they are egoists just as much as if they were unbelievers; genuine benevolence and a disinterested sense of duty cannot compete in their soul with their own individual well-being. "Does not the human heart contain immediate moral precepts, and in order to be moved in accordance with them, must the machinery of another world be applied to man?" So asks Immanuel Kant, a man who, as a priest of the Society of Jesus says, "more than any other has contributed scientifically to destroy the theocratic character in science and in life." "Could he be really honest, could he be called really virtuous," asked Kant, "who would gladly give himself up to his favourite vices if he feared no future punishment, and must one not rather say that he indeed shuns the practice of evil, but nourishes in his soul a vicious disposition; that he loves the advantage of conduct seemingly virtuous, while he hates virtue itself?" And in fact experience also teaches that many who are taught and convinced of a future world, at the same time give themselves up to vices and low-mindedness, and only bethink themselves of means whereby to ward off the threatening consequences of the future. And Schiller says in reference to his poem *Resignation:* "Its contents is a man's demand for another world because he has given up the good things of time for the good things of eternity, because he has resigned enjoyment in the world. In alarm he finds that he has been deceived in his calculation, and that a false passport for eternity has been given him. Thus it may and should be with every virtue which is practised merely because good wages are expected in return in another life. Our moral duties do not bind by contract, but are unconditional. Virtues which are practised simply over against certificates for future advantages are worthless. Virtue is an inward necessity, although there may be no other life than this. The poem, therefore, is not an attack upon true virtue; but upon that religious virtue which forms a contract with the Creator and puts out good actions at interest."

In many cases men have without doubt been better morally than they thought they were; they might fancy that nothing but belief in immortality kept them in the path of duty, while in reality the doing of right, as such, made them happy, and this immediate satisfaction rendered them able to withstand the temptations of the world. But undoubtedly the notion that a man cannot live uprightly without believing in immortality often has had a pernicious influence. The habit of falling back on that belief at all times of temptation could only have the effect of gradually weakening the direct motives towards the right and the good which are thereby rendered inactive, and the man ultimately is able to stand only upon those crutches. But, now, if a man's confidence in that belief is shattered, everything will begin to topple which had only that belief for its support, and will fall to pieces when that support falls.

How easily one may come to waver in the belief in immortality!

Sometimes the strong wish to live eternally, which so many men have, has been brought forward as a proof of the immortality of the soul. But do men not have countless wishes which remain unsatisfied? Still more passionately than for her own immortality a mother often wishes that her sick child may be permitted to live on this earth; nevertheless all her hot tears and prayers, all her storm of feeling and despair, cannot keep the child alive.

Probably not many will be induced by what we have said to accept the mortality of man. But ought they not to admit that perhaps their belief in immortality is erroneous? Although they, at the same time, may entertain the hope of immortality, should they not be morally bound not to build up the moral life of themselves and others upon so uncertain a foundation? Goethe believed in the life after death, but in his ethics this belief played no *rôle;* likewise the moral theories of the ancient Greeks were independent of it.

The reason for maintaining the belief in the immortality of the soul as the indispensable support of morality, is not always the one which presupposes selfishness as the ruling motive in every human being; many have thought that it would be unendurable, and break down all courage, all hope, all striving after what is high and noble, even to entertain the thought that our individual life should sometime cease to exist, for then our whole life would be a waste, empty and meaningless.

But is the influence of the doctrine of immortality upon the emotions really so favourable a one? Certainly in countless cases this doctrine has brought consolation in times of suffering, and quiet in the midst of danger, and has made easier the departure from loved ones and from life; but who counts the cases in which it has destroyed a good man's life happiness, and made the final hour more difficult for him? There are sanguine souls who, in spite of an enormous number of sins, still flatter themselves with the hope that in the summing up of their life there will be found an excess of good over evil, and they regard this as sufficient for the attainment of perpetual blessedness. But there are also more earnest minds, which at every transgression fear that the salvation of their soul has been endangered. They indeed do not know according to what measure it has been meted out to them. Let us suppose that our destiny is decided by lot, and that among a hundred chances there is one which means a life-long painful illness. Will not this possibility of becoming unhappy for a life-time put us into a disquietude? And yet the probability of our drawing this unhappy lot is only one chance in a hundred! Alban Stolz was certainly a man of worthy character, but we see in his biography, that in his last days "his early suffering of anxiety for the salvation of his soul would not depart from him." And Luther says in his Table Talks: "Christians could easily suffer and overcome death, if they did not know that it was the wrath of God. This makes death bitter for us. But the heathen die with the sense of security, they never see that fear of death is the wrath of God, but they think it is the end of nature. The Epicureans say: 'It has to do only with a very short moment.' I, poor miserable man, could find little consolation in the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and in the forgiveness of sins." And as anxiety for his own soul can darken a believer's life and his hour of death, so can his anxiety lest his loved ones shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven disturb him continually. We have this also to take into consideration, that for many men the thought of being compelled to live for ever is, on the whole, not stimulating but depressing.

But it is further to be borne in mind that even believers are often not perfectly sure in their hope of immortality. Many of them—and their number is increasing continually—know or fear that the continuation of life after death cannot be proved, perhaps that scientific probability is against it; and this circumstance must necessarily make a more or less deep impression upon the feelings. The fervent prayer for the restoration to health of a sick friend, the deep pain caused by his death, seem to show that the belief in a better world beyond does not shut out all doubt; the way believers really conduct themselves shows their real belief. But men require certainty concerning the things to which they commit their whole heart, and if they cannot attain this, their peace of mind must be disturbed.

> "You hope for immortality ;
> Can you the reasons name ?
> Well, yes, the sovereign ground is this :
> We cannot live without the same."

Thus says Goethe. It is quite impossible that this belief is necessary to an old man, after he has entertained it from his childhood on, and the limitation of his thought has long ago been fixed. But Goethe's word does not apply to man in general; the youthful mind is quite able to make friends with that thought, when it accustoms itself thereto. In fact there have been whole nations who have lived in happiness and peace without faith in immortality; with others it was just this thought of a life after death that disturbed their happiness, and they looked upon deliverance from a life after death as a thing most to be striven after; frightful was the thought, not of death, but of not being able to die. Among that people of genius, the ancient Greeks, the idea of immortality played a very insignificant *rôle;* it was never a point of dogmatic assertion, and by many always denied without in general giving any offence to others. With the Greeks belief in a life after death by no means lifted men, on an average, to a higher level of happiness. Not an endless extension of life, but a beautiful and worthy close was the wish of the genuine Greek.

It is not right to give out anything as certain which we do not know; to let a human being from childhood clamour for something which perhaps is a fiction. It is not right to represent death to a child as something horrible, and to intensify the natural force of death by fancies. It is also neither wise nor just to keep the thought of death at a distance. Hufeland, the great physician and philanthropist, says: "How greatly do those deceive themselves who think to find a means against the fear of death by keeping out of mind the thought of death! Before they know it, in the midst of the merriest joy the thought of it will suddenly rush upon them, and they will shudder so much the more terribly the more they are a stranger to it. I can regard only that man as happy, who has brought himself to the point of thinking of death in the midst of pleasure without being disturbed; and all may believe me when I say on the ground of experience that by frequently making ourselves acquainted with the idea, and by making less repulsive our conception of death, it can gradually be brought to be a matter of extreme indifference. . . . He alone who no longer fears death is free. There is nothing more which can enchain him or make him anxious or unhappy. His soul becomes filled with a high imperturbable spirit which even strengthens the vital energy and thereby becomes a positive means towards keeping death remote."

Death is certain, but there remains a consolation for us although death be our real end. Has not every period of life its own worth, and is this diminished by the fact that each period at some time comes to an end? The life of a child has its worth, not only as a time of preparation for that of a grown-up man, as a means to an end, but it has in itself its own peculiar value. If the happy life of a child is annihilated we lament because we would have gladly seen it continue; but it has not on that account been in vain, in every moment it had its own worth in itself, and when a man has passed beyond the stage of childhood he is not accustomed, if the new period of his life satisfies him, to lament that the former has ended. The life of a young man or a maiden is precious in its own way; and in like manner grown-up men and women do not complain that their former life is over, provided they only feel themselves happy in their present life. And also the life of an aged person has its peculiar value—although this does not imply that all sections of life have the same worth. The normal old age is not a time of decay; but is a period in which the attractions of life gradually lose their charm, and a desire for rest enters in.

If from a purely objective point of view we consider this characteristic of human life, we will not complain of it, but accept it as something harmonious in itself and satisfactory. Because a thing does not last through an endless time is no proof that it has no worth; it has its worth as long as it lasts; not an endless elongation of the individual life we wish, but a rejuvenation of life by replacing the old individuals with new ones, a beginning again of the rhythm of childhood, youth, manhood, old age, and death, as in nature it actually exists.

What would many a one desire if able to determine his own future? To be a child once more, then a youth or maiden, then a man or woman. But it is not his own life he would live, but another. But see! you have what you longed for, if you only stop your selfish yearning, if you become one in thought and feeling with humanity!

Would it then be better if there were no death? Let us for a moment suppose that men lived for ever, then mankind would soon have increased to such an extent, that a further multiplication would be a disadvantage to all. It would then be necessary that no more children be brought into the world, and only grown-up people would be found. All family life, the blessedness which men find in it, would cease. Now would that be a desirable condition of things?

"Life," says Goethe, "is the most beautiful invention of nature, and death is her trick of art to have much life." And a priest of the Society of Jesus declares: "The grave makes the cradle possible, and we might almost say that out of death springs the fresh active life of youth which ceaselessly pulsates through the arteries of mankind."

How can a man believe that our life on earth loses all its value and meaning if it is not continued for ever? Are we to measure the worth of life by the "yard-stick of time"? Are the contents of a thing better by an endless extension of it?

Although death is an evil on account of the pain which it brings to the living—and it would still be an evil although we should survive it, yet it is not in itself an evil. Seneca says: "Death belongs to the class of things which indeed are not an evil, but still have the appearance of being an evil."

As to the process of dying, there is nothing more frightful in it than in fainting away. "Men build up," says Hufeland, "the most remarkable conception of dying, of the violent separation of the soul from the body and the like. But this is all wholly unfounded. Certainly no man has felt death, and we depart from life with as little consciousness as we enter it." And Hufeland sums up the law and the prophets, the single rule for the soul, in the attainment of happiness and old age in these words: "Love life and do not fear death."

The value of the contents of life will not be lost, but rather increased by the thought of death. The feeling of life must be strengthened by the contrast with its opposite, non-existence. The significance of each day, of every hour, is heightened by the consciousness that it is once for all, that it can never be brought back, that it is a definite part of this our single life. The believer in mortality will not with scorn, as is so often done by those who hope for immortality, regard any single experience, or any joys of himself or others.

Death is to our feelings an evil; but it would be a greater evil if there were no death; for it is the condition of the eternal youth of mankind. We may, therefore, in our mind make our peace with the fact of death; we recognise that this constitution of the universe which brings about a proportionate rejuvenation of life is good. "Do not despise death," says the Stoic Emperor, "but be well content with it, since this too is one of those things which nature wills. For, as much as it is to be and to grow old and to increase, and to reach maturity and to have teeth and beard, and grey hairs, and to beget and to be pregnant, and to bring forth, and all the other natural operations which the seasons of thy life bring, such also is dissolution. This then is consistent with the character of a reflecting man, to be neither careless, nor impatient, nor contemptuous, with respect to death, but to wait for it as one of the operations of nature." "Everything harmonises with me which is harmonious to thee, oh Universe! Nothing for me is too early or too late which is in due time for thee. Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, oh Nature! from thee are all things, to thee all things return."

"I do not repent having lived, because I have so lived that I do not believe I was born in vain." This said Cato. The consciousness of duty done makes dying easy, so that we can say with Paul: "Death is swallowed up in victory; Oh death! where is thy sting? Oh grave! where is thy victory?"

Love toward man overcomes the fear of death. Although we grow older and approach the outer limits of our own life, still that lives which we love, our interest in life cannot, therefore, grow less; what happens to mankind has become our own personal fate. The answer to the question: "What shall I do to be saved?" remains always the same: Love mankind more than yourself. No truer word has ever been said than this, that "Love is strong as death."

The last hour is an act of life; man may meet it worthily or not; our love or our self-seeking, our bravery or our cowardice, shows itself then only for the last time. The hour of death makes an indelible impression upon those who survive; he, therefore, who with consciousness sees it near, will regard it as a matter of duty to meet it nobly. If in a circle of friends, he will give them once more a proof of his love, and this will bring him consolation. Duty and Love—these are the conquerors of death.

But let us not deceive ourselves, let us not strip the most solemn events of life of their deep and earnest significance; the death of friends is a deep, indeed an irreparable, loss, and we have a right to weep.

Grief at the death-bed of one we love has not only one source. Now for the first time do many with clear consciousness apply practically to themselves the old saying, "All men must die," and say: "I must die—and who knows how soon!" Nevertheless this element of pain, if it is present at all, is generally very slight; for many, even for such who entertain no hope of meeting again in heaven, find a certain consolation in the thought, "I too." "To you, my dear daughter, nothing worse happened than what awaits me." Another element is the deep sympathy with the one who has died. This one, however, suffers no more pain, he has the perfect peace; we can really sympathise only with the one who is dying, and who sees himself torn from those he loves, and from his most precious and unfinished undertakings. The most terrible pain which the open grave can call forth is that when we must say to ourselves: "It is too late, we can never make good the wrong we have done to the dead!" But even when this thought does not enter in, still the pain remains which the loss of a beloved being causes us; and deep may be the sorrow for the loss which has fallen upon others, perhaps upon the whole community. Even the hope of immortality could not persuade us to regard the great evil as no evil.

"But however natural and sacred the deep grief for our loss, we ought to attempt to assuage it, for," as Plutarch declared, "suffering for one dead, if too violent, over-reaches the mark, and defeats itself in its care for the memory of the dead, because a memory that is too painful induces a man to blot it out." We must always think that those we care for are not quite lost; if we love them truly, they live in us until our life ceases. "For ever wilt thou love and she be fair;" this is the consolation which the poet offers the unhappy man from whom death had snatched away the one most loved. We may continue grateful; we need not forget the inestimable benefit which the life, although so short, of one we cherish has been to us. "The noble do not ask too much," says Salter, "they do not expect too much. They know that much they have, and they do not grudge to give it up, nor think that because they have it they must have it everlastingly. There is so much selfishness in grief; overwhelmed with a sense of loss, we are apt to think of nothing else, and the great gain there has been to us in the life that has been taken away is forgotten, the preciousness of which we can perhaps only realise when the sting of present grief is gone, and the dead face lives again in the calm and sacred land of memory. Rather with a noble resignation and thankfulness should we consign our dear ones to the grave. It is not, my friends, that we are singled out for a special judgment; when we give up our dead, we but enter into a common sorrow — a sorrow that visits the proudest and humblest, that has entered into unnumbered hearts before us and will innumerable ones after us; a sorrow that should make the world one, and dissolve all other feelings into sympathy and love. . . . Yes, not only with resignation, but with thankfulness, let us give up our dead, thankfulness for all they have been to us, thankfulness for all the memories they leave with us, thankfulness—for our lives are richer because of them. And not only our own life, but that of others, is made richer."

"Honour to the dead! For without them we should be nothing—nothing but naked savages in dreary swamps and wildernesses, our soul itself a swamp and wilderness." The soul of the best lives in us, many of their words echo to-day as audibly in our ear as they did hundreds and thousands of years ago in the ear of their contemporaries. It is for us to seek to attain such an eternal soul! And if the dead have left behind them errors, we honour them by avoiding these, and we complete the good begun by them. Such work, earnest, diligent, and useful, will give us a mental exhilaration, better than any journey into foreign countries, or any distraction amusement can afford.

Duty and love—these are the holiest consolation. "Arise, be strong!" says Felix Adler to the bereaved; "you are not free, you poor and sadly stricken friends, to stand aside in idle woe, but you shall make for the departed a memorial in your lives." "The love you can no longer lavish on one, the many call for it. The cherishing care you can no longer bestow upon your child, the neglected children of the poor appeal for it. The sympathy you can no longer give your friend, the friendless cry for it. In alleviating the misery of others, your own misery will be alleviated, and in healing you will find that there is cure." "To help one another is our wisdom and our renown, and our sweet consolation." Stanton Coit speaks of "that feeling which in the darkest hour of bereavement steals into us with a warm, familiar light. A peace floods the soul; we are no longer alone. It appears at the moment when resignation becomes complete, and private sorrow melts into universal sympathy. Only a few days ago a woman, whose heart had been bleeding because death had torn her child from her arms, told me that she had had this sweet experience just when the blackness of grief had settled thickest upon her. She called it the awakening to the consciousness of God as a loving father. But as she told me, and as I heard her relate, how since that comfort came she had sought out the poor and the dying everywhere, especially little children, and wanted to be a mother to them, I could not help thinking that what she had awakened to was the consciousness, not of God as a loving father, but of the whole world as her beloved child."

> "Thy love must last, whate'er betide!
> Whate'er befall, let love not fail!

Soon comes the hour when thou beside
The grave of friends shalt stand and wail."

This is the warning death gives us—death, our earnest friend and moral adviser. It teaches us to live. And the more fervently does it bid us love if it is really death, the final end, after which there will be no meeting again. We must be kindly and peaceable. We dare not cause pain to those dear to us; who knows how soon they shall be withdrawn for ever! Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

"O the anguish," says George Eliot, "of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we have shown them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know!" Let us not wait until our own personal experience brings forth this bitter cry of pain! We may show before it is too late to our faithful loved ones—wife, sister, child, friend, teacher—the love, tenderness, and respect which is really in us. It is a common experience "that only after our friends are taken from us do we in general appreciate them. But if their death has this effect upon us, then the mere thought of their death will have a better effect. Without overwhelming us with grief and regret, it will make us appreciate them while they are still living. How all of us pitied, even to contempt, the great Carlyle when we heard of his remorse for having neglected his wife, which her death awakened in him. Why did he not anticipate this event by bringing it earlier before his imagination? Then all that she was made to suffer, and all his bitterness and self-reproach, would have been prevented. The sting of bereavement is not in the loss, but in this, that all chance to atone for the past is over. Perhaps we did not fully express in word and act our real devotion, perhaps we were cruel in little things, perhaps we refused to gratify a thousand minor wishes, which, if gratified, would have produced a world of pleasure, and cost no pain. But let us not wait until some bitter experience has forced this thought upon us. How often parents are severe and impatient towards their children, sacrificing their children's pleasure to further worldly success, until one day one of them is stricken down; then the rule of the household becomes tempered with thoughtful regard, so that if the rest shall be taken away, at least they shall have been, while they remained, happy and free. . . . And equally wholesome is the thought of the death of those whom we only meet in business or casually. The rich employer may bring before his imagination the sure result of those long hours of work to this frail woman, or to that man already ill and needing rest, and may prevent the suffering. Thus in place of the pangs of guilt, which in a short time their death would cause him, he may bring to himself the immediate joy of blessing others, and give them, in place of their untimely suffering, health and the sweet sense of being treated like human beings. O death! thou dost wound us indeed, but most bitterly in this that thou remindest us of the wounds we too have inflicted."

In the same way as that of friends, the thought of our own death assists us in living a right life; and therefore the thought of the one as well as of the other is a duty. The night when no man can work the sleep from which there is no awakening, approaches nearer and nearer to us; let us not be already dead—that is, without activity! "Do quickly what thou canst—do not loiter! Yet to-day do what thou oughtest!" is Lavater's warning to us. Let us watch because we do not know in what hour death shall come. "So live," says Thomas à Kempis, "that death may never see thee unprepared." And although we may be granted a long life, still we do not know whether we shall continue to have the energy of body and mind which is a pre-requisite of the work which we could do now. And how much work there is to be done in the world, how many imperfections to destroy, how many good things to acquire! Rabbi Tarphon says: "The day is short, the labour great!"

The thought of death will make us live in temperance. Surely the idea of death is in fact, as Hufeland thought, an excellent help to a right life. Death teaches us how to live, the most difficult of all arts. It is a good "professor of morals," as Asmus says; it heals us of our vanity, scorn, heartlessness, and worldly ambition; it gives us moderation and dignity, it makes us brave and strong. Voltaire's thought that "as we have only two days to live, it is not worth while to spend these in cringing before wretched scoundrels," might do many unworthy, restless strivers much good. Death makes us live inwardly, makes us give up mere outward show, and not entrust our whole heart to what may be lost. "Find peace, not in men, not in friendship, not in the hope of future happiness, but in the God, in the good that is in thee."

Some believers in God consider that man is capable of leading a moral life without being urged into it by the hope of future reward, or the fear of future punishment; and they recognise the fact that life would still be worth living even if it were not endless. But they, at the same time, call attention to a high significance which an enlightened idea of God, purely as such, possesses for the moral elevation of mankind. God is the ideal of the highest perfection, and our aim is to become like him. "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Those who reason in this way would lead us to do good through motives of worship and love of God.

This way is more worthily and wisely chosen than that which the egoistic believers in God recommend to us. But if we are capable of reverencing the moral attributes in God, and of letting ourselves in that way become enthusiastic to emulate him, we must then also be capable of reverencing them in men, and of being in that way led to desire perfection. We do not need first to set that which is worthy of reverence up in heaven in order to see that it is worthy. Nay, rather we must first feel the human worth before we can grasp the thought of divine perfection. All the characteristics of divine goodness are characteristics of human goodness. And what else is piety but a transference of the feelings which a child has for its parents to the relation of men towards their Creator? In a family the feeling of piety does not have its root in the belief in God. In general all the feelings which men have entertained towards their gods, so far as they have not been purely æsthetic, have been social and human — feelings which were originally excited by the contemplation of human beings. This is expressed even by Pestalozzi, and that in the passage where he is aiming to defend the indispensability of the idea of God. "This I soon saw," he explains, "that the feelings of love, trust, thankfulness, and the habit of obedience must be developed in me before I can entertain them towards God." "I must love men, I must trust men, I must obey men, before I can raise myself to the level of loving God, thanking him, trusting him, and obeying him." "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And in truth the thought of perfection actualised in men must be a stronger incentive than the thought of perfection in God. The picture which men make of the character of God is, in proportion, indistinct and colourless as they attempt to form a less anthropomorphic conception of him; great and good men are a pattern which exercises greater power over the imagination and emotions. What is more, that which men could conceive, an admirer of their excellence can perhaps also himself do. But he cannot entertain the notion of equalling God. Accordingly we see that it was the thought of the man Buddha which exercised upon millions an ennobling influence, that it was the thought of another man which, more than the idea of the Father in heaven, inspired those who called themselves Christians. Even those who do not regard Jesus of Nazareth as a God may be most deeply penetrated with his personality, and experience a powerful influence from it upon their inner life. But the attitude of a morally well-developed man is most certainly different from that of a believer of the old style.

But now the theologian will call our attention to the idea of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God, and the significance of these for the moral life of man. The thought that God is not far off from us, and knows what we do, must, he says, make us strong in time of danger and suffering, and free us from temptations! God sees us! You cannot escape God's eye though you take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea! From how many countless wicked deeds has this thought held men back! God, your Protection and Defence, is standing by your side wherever you may be; what confidence and what reassurance has this consciousness given men in time of danger! But does it then not remain true that something divine is ever near to us wherever we may be, that it sees us although the darkness is round about us? The divine dwells in us, and everything great, good, and holy in the idea of God arises out of our own heart; moral consciousness is the spring of all that has value in religion. When the fictions are set aside which have been attached to the real experiences of the soul, these latter will not vanish.

But if the voice of this inner witness be weak, what then? The ideal companionship of good men, whether dead or living, is what we need. What is the reading of the New Testament other than an association with Christ and his apostles? And in the same way many are the dead who speak to us and bring us life.

Many have believed that we must assume personal immortality, because only upon this supposition, it is said, can a man be responsible. Of those who think this we have a right to demand that they prove the connection of the sense of duty and responsibility with belief in God and immortality. We are not bound to do right because God wills it, or because he will punish wrong conduct with tortures after death; on the contrary, if we are bound to follow God's commandments, it must be because what they command us to do is right. Not because God commands them, but because they are right, are we bound to do certain deeds; this is the expression of our moral consciousness. But a commandment which does not come out of our own heart, a "thou shalt" which another says to us, may be a commandment and an ought—but a moral commandment or ought it is not. And our feeling of moral responsibility is the consciousness that we shall have pangs of conscience if we do not act in a certain way ; it has nothing whatever to do with the notion that another being will inflict pain upon us on account of it in another world.

The wise father, the wise mother, who wish to bring up their children to be good and happy, will not make use of the fear of eternal torment, nor of the idea that the sacredness of goodness depends upon heaven and hell, lest when the idea of retribution after death is lost, as it may easily be, the feeling should arise that the sanctity of good conduct had also been taken away. And the wise statesman will not attempt to preserve artificial ideas that are outgrown, but will build upon fresh and living emotions to which the future belongs.

By giving up the belief that a higher power embodies our ideals of justice, our feeling of moral responsibility is not diminished but augmented. The notion that a Divine Being in some way or another will reward goodness and punish badness, will help tenderly the poor and neglected, and finally bring all the evil that men do into the service of goodness, may be consoling, but it may very easily mislead us into not applying all our energies in our struggle for the good and against the evil, but rather tempt us to look to support from above ; and thus the belief in a moral order of the universe may prevent the universe from becoming morally ordered. Whoever is aware that the consequences of his conduct are inevitable, that no God ever turns evil into good, will manifest greater earnestness in his conduct. Whoever is convinced that no one helps men if they do not help one another, that they hunger in soul and body if they do not receive earthly support, that love does not dwell above the stars but in our own heart, and that if we are ever to behold the divine and a kingdom of heaven, we ourselves must create it—whoever has this conviction will apply himself with so much the greater zeal and energy to the human task—he will more loudly summon his fellow-men as his only comrades in a struggle for the good when his own energy is not adequate—he will not think, as so many believers in ancient doctrines have thought, that the universal order of things round about him, in spite of all the misery and trouble which it contains, is holy, simply because brought about by the incomprehensible wisdom of God, but he will feel himself responsible for its evils. "To understand," says Edith Simcox, "that the will of every man is a moral power, second to nothing except the united or compound will of many men, does not make men less, but rather more disposed to value the type of human perfection which they have no choice but to conceive as the supreme good; and to understand that if they wish this type realised they must realise it themselves, does not make them less but rather more disposed than before to do the practical work which they suppose to be favourable to their desire."

Human experience, thought, and moral consciousness are no longer compatible with the faith which was in former times a consolation and a support. The change of our whole way of thinking and believing has been accomplished quite gradually, almost imperceptibly, but it is irresistible. Our whole view of the world is from beginning to end different from that which is presupposed in our traditional documents, the contents of which come from times and from races which had no true sciences. The conceptions which a child left to itself builds up concerning nature are very different from those of a scientific investigator of nature; and likewise those views of the world which sprang up in the childhood of mankind deviate widely from the ones to which the more highly developed and critical mind has reached. And the ripened mind of mankind can as little accept the views of earlier periods as a standard of truth as a man can recognise the fancies of childhood's years as a guiding star for mature age. The old theology presupposes the ancient cosmology.

Let us assume for the time—as at present so many do—that as a necessary consequence of the new view of the universe we must renounce the fundamental doctrines of Christian, Jewish, and Mahomedan theology: the doctrine of a personal God, to whom men may turn in prayer, and of personal immortality. On this supposition what becomes of morality? What is ethics minus theology? Has it more or less significance than before?

All sciences and arts have freed themselves from supernaturalism, and now rest alone upon facts, in accordance with experience. And they have become not weaker but stronger. The moral energies of mankind likewise are striving at present to make themselves independent and to throw off everything transcendental, metaphysical, and foreign, which has enveloped them. The Churches in the past have doubted the free moral strength of mankind. They do still; and in that way they are an obstacle to the moral life. St. Augustine writes that free-will without God's grace and the Holy Ghost can do nothing but sin. This was also Luther's view, who said that everything which is in our own will is bad, and that everything which is in our understanding is even an error and a blindness. Because the Church still retains this doctrine, although perhaps she seldom gives it so strong an expression, we cannot recognise her as the representative of the moral life of to-day.

"All that the positive religions desire, as they tell us," says Felix Adler, Lecturer to the Society for Ethical Culture of New York, "is to elevate the moral life of the members of the Churches and the community. . . . They all say: 'We want to lead men to do what is right;' but they add, 'No man can do what is right unless he first accepts certain doctrines.' . . . Therefore you must lay the whole emphasis of your teaching on belief in God, or belief in a future state of rewards and punishments. . . . They think it is necessary to reach the conscience indirectly. We believe it is possible to reach the conscience directly. . . . The effect has been, as shown by history, that this assumption that there are certain preliminaries which must be fulfilled has led men to give their chief time and attention to these preliminaries; and in the attempt to build up these indispensable conditions to the moral life, strange to say, the religious world has ignored the first principles of morality. . . . The round-about method of the Christian Church has borne evil fruit. The way you seek good is false. By teaching that belief is necessary you are putting obstacles between man and right action."

And the leader of the Philadelphia Society for Ethical Culture, Samuel Burns Weston, says: "Morality has always, even to this very day, occupied a place of secondary importance in religion. And herein we feel bound to differ from all the religions of the past. We believe that morality should be brought to the foreground in religion as the one object of prime and fundamental importance. In the very fact that the religions have hitherto regarded the moral life of man as less essential than doctrinal beliefs, in the fact that they have given the priority to beliefs concerning powers and realms wholly apart from human life, we have the secret of all their wide differences and bitter antagonisms."

And W. L. Sheldon, the Ethical Lecturer in St. Louis, says: "The trouble has been that a vast deal of the strength and enthusiasm of the religious teacher has had to be drawn off and wasted in rallying their forces in defence of their intellectual position. Too much of their energy has to be expended in explaining away doubts, finding new meanings for old ways and forms, trying to prove *this* instead of *that*, or *that* instead of *this*, to be the teaching of the pristine Church, so that only a small surplus of power is in reserve to be cast in the direction of stemming the tide of moral lassitude which is threatening to overwhelm the world. Men of splendid mental attainments and of high moral enthusiasm, who, if their energies could be concentrated in the one direction of their sympathies, might achieve great work for the betterment of the race, are hampered and constantly set back by having the dogmas and creeds dragging at their heels. Will the time come —as come we hope it may—when the clergy will say from their very souls: 'I care not whether this that I say be Judaism or not Judaism, Christian or not Christian, Scriptural or not Scriptural, by the faith within me, by the study that I have made, by all that I hold dear, come what may, I believe this thing that I assert to be the truth, therefore I care for it alone.' When the clergy have once said this we shall have in the world a corps of religious teachers who will perhaps shake the world from its moral lethargy and indifference, and build finally a bulwark of religious fact which shall stand the wear and tear of the limitless ages."

And Stanton Coit, Lecturer of the South Place Ethical Society, London, says: "Ethics is the science of good character and right conduct, and it is based on our moral experience and our moral judgment, and should be kept independent of all theology, just as the science of correct thinking is, or political economy, and all other sciences of the mind and society, and as all practical arts are. We are pledged to no philosophical theory as to the nature of God and the universe, or as to the limits of human knowledge. And as long as the atheist, or theist, or agnostic, or positivist does not derive his sanction to right actions from his speculative theories, we gladly welcome him. We would leave the speculative thought of each individual free . . . and assert that character and conduct are independent of philosophical speculations. We would then unite on the basis of character and conduct, and try to build up these as best we can in ourselves and others."

According to Immanuel Kant all those who regard not formulated creeds and church ceremonies, but the disposition of a well-ordered life, as the true service of God, constitute an invisible Church. If they join together for the exclusive purpose of opposing evil in the world and furthering good, they constitute an "Ethical Society." Such societies have been organised in our day in America under the direction of Felix Adler, who appears to have been influenced by no one more than by Kant. "Among all the exhausted craters," says a liberal religious critic of our times, "I see but one summit beginning to dart out the sacred flame. The movement which in largeness, freedom, influence, may claim to be the successor to that of Channing, of Parker, of Emerson, is one in New York which is trying to found religion on pure morality"—the Ethical Movement of Felix Adler and his friends. "Whether a Church is equal to the test of its times is seen in its ability to draw to it the moral genius of its times." The clergy have been educated, not to be the moral leaders of the people, but scholarly theologians, philologists, and historians ; and accordingly the people have become very much educated in theology and very little in ethics. "The moral ignorance of educated people is a necessary result of the long confusion of morality with theology."

Those who would found an Ethical religion, the basis of which is not to be supernatural mysteries which no man can understand, but something which all believe, and no man of sound sense doubts, have removed the occasion of Emerson's accusations against our times. "It accuses us," says Emerson, "that pure ethics is not now formulated and concreted into a cultus, a fraternity with assemblies and holy days, with song and book, with brick and stone." Ethical societies have recognised the self-sufficiency of the moral consciousness, and have made it the whole basis of their belief and action. The place which the old Churches gave to theology they give to morality, to upright conduct. They feel no enmity towards the Jewish or Christian religion ; on the contrary, they are at present perhaps the truest friends of these religions, inasmuch as they would rescue for the coming time everything which in these historic forms mankind has by experience discovered to be of moral worth ; while those who wish to preserve at any price the outward forms and beliefs are doing all in their power to make mankind lose everything. The ethical religion, its moral faith, leads also to practical work among the poor. In many ways there is evidence that the pure belief in man, and the pure love for mankind, belief in the glorified earth to be created by man's own energy, the appeal to man's single responsibility for that which happens in the moral world, the appeal to the feeling of duty and of the moral joy which accompanies right action, are now more powerful than speculative doctrines of a theological or metaphysical kind. There is evidence that the problems of life wax greater than the problems of theology.

What then are the Ethical Societies aiming at? "The forms of dogmatic belief currently taught," answers the Ethical Society of Chicago, in its Statement of Principles, " have ceased to command our intellectual assent or to satisfy our moral needs. They obstruct the development both of mind and heart. The Society for Ethical Culture aims at serving the cause of the good independently of the religious dogmas of the past. While standing entirely outside the Churches, whether Christian or Jewish, it does not spend its time in attacking them, but seeks to take up the work which they to such an extent leave undone—the work of moral and social reform."

The Statement of Principles by the Philadelphia Society contains the following sentences: "We affirm the need of a new statement of the ethical code of mankind. The formulations of duty which were given by the great religious teachers of the past are not sufficient for the changed conditions of modern society. We believe that moral problems have arisen in this industrial, democratic, scientific age, which require new and larger formulations of duty."

Do we deceive ourselves in hoping that sometime in the distant future, when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, the Christian Churches will all be transformed into Ethical Societies? Mankind is still young! Churches we hope there will always be. Organ and song shall ever resound there, but we hope that the hymns will become purely human and moral, that men will not sacrifice to God or petition him, but will appeal to men and make men better. God in heaven does not need us, but we need all of our emotional energy in order to make our earth, which is so full of evil, more like the ideal. How much of what is best and noblest in men is lost to their fellow-men, because it is directed toward something outside the human world, towards something which may not exist, and which if it does exist is self-sufficient! Is this right? Ought we not rather to trust and believe with all our heart in the good itself, in all our trials take refuge in it, and commit our affections to it? Of this God should not the prayer hold good: "Thou shalt have none other gods besides me"?

THE COMMUNICATION OF MORAL IDEAS AS A FUNCTION OF AN ETHICAL SOCIETY[1]

BERNARD BOSANQUET

THIS is a subject which has been much discussed in private among us, and when it was suggested that there should be lectures upon the work of an Ethical Society, I thought that it might be profitable, one evening, to interchange ideas on this most difficult aspect of our operations.

It is in great part a practical question, and is very ill-fitted for dogmatic treatment ; and in dealing with it I feel more especially the truth of what a friend observed to me the other day. " You know," he said, " I think all preaching has a certain affinity to bad manners." Then, on the other hand, it is of no use talking at all unless one speaks pretty freely ; so I wish to throw out quite boldly the suggestions that present themselves to me, and to illustrate them as distinctly as I can, just in order that people may think over such things, if what is said comes home to them; and if not, they can pass it by.

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[1] Delivered at Essex Hall for the London Ethical Society.

Everything is contagious. We are all of us always communicating ideas, and more especially moral ideas, and it might be said that an Ethical Society could exist without making any *special* attempt in this direction by platform utterances or by teaching the young; it might exist for various classes of useful work, or as a federation of more limited organisations, united only by the actual definite sympathy of fellow-workers; and by such an existence it would still, through its work, be communicating moral ideas.

But the ethical movement has had from the beginning a point of view which its members have been desirous to communicate in a more or less general form. And, perhaps, assuming that the existence of societies with so wide a purpose as that of the ethical movement is in itself desirable, it is further inevitable that the attempt to communicate moral ideas should take, among other forms, that of teaching or of lecturing; otherwise, the comprehensiveness of the ethical purpose might perhaps destroy cohesion, for no purely practical organisation can effectively maintain so extended an aim as that of promoting good life. A benevolent nobleman, who lent his house for many philanthropic purposes, used to exact from every visitor a contribution of one shilling for the

"Universal Beneficent Society." This idea was always and properly ridiculed. You cannot have a practical society for improving things in general. Practical operations must form each its own organisation, and if you want to retain in unity a number of separate working branches, then it may be desirable to make some attempt at expressing and communicating such moral ideas as represent the spirit of your action. Objections may be raised against any form of words, and it has occurred to me sometimes to doubt whether the term "ethical" is wholly free from ambiguity, when taken to indicate the concrete, though ideal, purpose which we of the new reformation recognise as our common property. The word has an appearance of alluding to "ethics" or "moral philosophy" in a way which I am obliged to deprecate on theoretical and practical grounds, which the present lecture will, I hope, make plain. But those who have the capacity to initiate a movement have the right to christen it; and any one whose petty scruples about the use of a technical phrase seem likely to deter him from co-operating in his degree with an effort which has substantial value should, as Aristotle would have advised him, "listen to what Hesiod says," in lines which I should like to see set up as a motto in all places where men meet for action and deliberation,—

> "Supreme is he whose wit meets every need,
> And good is he who wise advice will heed;
> But he that cannot teach, nor will not learn,
> He is a fool that no man's wage should earn."

We now have this ethical movement, which evidently meets a certain need. It has brought us together, and we therefore think it desirable not merely to work, but to utter here and elsewhere, in plain language, for the furtherance of our purpose in coming together, such matters as may best promote the spread of an enlightened morality.

How, then, not merely by example and by ordinary civic activity, but by teaching and lecturing, are moral ideas to be communicated?

I will begin by considering three kinds of suggestions, which I have gathered from private communications, and from observing what is actually attempted by various agencies.

(1) One friend, who permits me to refer to a conception on which he has expended much patient reflection, has formulated a scheme for bringing together the best heads of all civilised nations, to consider salient questions or cases of reflective morality, their judgment upon which should then become public, backed by their authority, for the improvement of the general standard and of the general practice.

Now, I will not urge, as a final objection against such a scheme, that authority is destructive to free morality, in which every man must be his own tribunal, because my friend only intended that the precepts to be thus formulated should come before the world with a certain weight, entitling them to consideration. And this, of course, would be a perfectly fair use of moral influence. But I will say at once that I feel compelled to conclude that a further form of this same difficulty would be fatal to the conception, in the precise mode in which it presented itself to its author's mind. It pre-supposes, I think, that morality is a sort of separate district or province of life, in which some selected persons, or eminent pundits, are more especially at home. But this suggestion is abhorrent to me. Morality, as I think of it, is a way of living. And therefore it is not certain, in the first place, that even the simplest decisions or verdicts could be universally valid; for duties vary with the conditions of individual lives. It is certain, in the second place, that no really difficult cases could be embodied in such decisions; for every conflict of duties is a unique question of the shape and growth of a particular individual life, and no collection of thinkers can put themselves in the place of one man, much less of every man, so as to tell him, "Thus and thus your life must be shaped."

All attempts at general guidance of this kind are and remain platitudes. The great satirist Rabelais knew this when he depicted a man asking advice whether or no he should marry. At the end of every sentence in which he states his case, as his wishes vary, and the colour of his statement varies with them, his interlocutor's advice alternates between, "Well, then, marry," and "Well, then, don't marry!" through several closely printed pages. Most of us, I think, who have asked, or who have given specific advice, will recognise the portraiture.

But do I say, therefore, that there is nothing in the conception upon which I am commenting? No; I think there is something in it. When such suggestions are made to one, I think one ought always to look round and ask one's self, "Now, is there anything which has been actually done to which this idea should direct one's attention, and what conditions of possibility do the actual facts suggest?" And if we hold tight to the truth that morality is a way of living, and that important questions of the way of living are important questions of morality, then we find that international conferences do take place on grave moral matters with valuable results. International arbitration, international copyright, the labour and short-hour question, the suppression of the slave trade, primary education, poor-law, and charitable administration,—in all these provinces, and many more, the experts of different nations have held intercourse, and have done much to arrive at reciprocal enlightenment and a common ground of action.

Now, what are the conditions of these useful and effectual deliberations? Clearly, I think, in the first place, a special tribunal or conference for each kind of questions; and secondly, as the essential reason for this condition, a previous habituation of the assessors, by work on common lines, or by the pressure of a common and definite necessity, in entering into one another's lives.

It is not, then, that the members of the conference are to be regarded as moral pundits, and that others come to them for the resolution of specifically moral cases; it is, rather, that one man or woman is toiling, say at infant schools, in London, and others at Naples, and in Berlin, and in New York or Chicago, and all these can come together consciously to good purpose, because, in the bonds of a common work, their lives were already united. Let me take one homely example. Ask your chorus of pundits, "Is it moral to break down the responsibility of the parent for the sake of a direct good to the child?" I cannot predict the answer of such a chorus, but one thing I can say with absolute certainty: it must begin with an *if*. "If the good to the child is genuine, does not undo itself, can *only* be got by the sacrifice of parental responsibility, and so on, then—" What on earth can such a reply tell any reasonable creature that he did not know before?

But now let us suppose that we have a conference of managers of schools, together with experienced poor-law or charitable administrators. Let us take the history of family after family, analyse it, observe the effect of free dinners and of self-supporting paid dinners, both on the family and on the neighbourhood, and then let us—do what? Pass a resolution on the matter? Yes, if we like; but, chiefly, let us go back to our work and shape it as best we can, not necessarily in the same mould all over the world, but in the light and in the strength of the vital moral experience which, by others' help, we have now made our own.

I think that this condition of a definite common work or common necessity, shared by those who are to decide, and relevant to the question to be decided, gives us the type and limit of what is useful in moral decisions by experts, and of the persons to whom alone such a decision can be of value,—namely, those who share the common experience in question.

(2) On the other hand, a question has been raised, how far abstract philosophical matter should enter into the communication of moral ideas. All that I

have to say to-night is in answer to this question in its most general sense, but in a more specific sense I will try to give it an immediate reply. It is taken to mean, I think, "Are we to go into problems, say, about the nature and existence of the Deity, or about the place of consciousness in reality—theological or metaphysical ideas—with a view to demonstrating something that may make in favour of morality?" No; as a rule, I think not. We must not suppose that the foundation of everything is somewhere outside the thing itself; and we must not suppose that the supports of any moral theory are the supports of morality. Unquestionably, moral philosophy involves a good deal of metaphysics and psychology. But it is possible to present a reasonable view of moral facts without explaining all the metaphysical ideas that such a view may ultimately be found to imply. I may compare the relation of intelligent morality to abstract philosophical doctrines with the relation of the species and genera of plants, as naturally classified, to the most universal laws revealed by physiological research. The two subjects are intimately connected, and you cannot explain how the plants came to be what they are without knowing profound and ultimate physiological facts, which, at the present moment, no one can be said to know. But this does not make you doubt that a fuchsia is a fuchsia, and is cognate with a willow-herb, or that wheat is a grass which has become by cultivation one great basis of human life. And so with morality. It is undoubtedly interesting, and may be instructive, to pursue by analysis those implied truths or general facts which lie behind the existence of man as a moral being. But a reasonable view—a right arrangement according to affinity and value—of the facts of human life can be presented without metaphysical formulæ, though *not*, in my judgment, without the analysis of human society, of the chief interests of life, and of the temper known as ethical faith. For these are not outside morality, but are its constituent elements.

(3) If we do not call œcumenical councils of morals, if we do not discuss theological or metaphysical problems, ought we, however, in our teaching, to advocate ethical ideas in the sense of abstract ideas about morality, such as the principle of "justice," which we hear of a good deal to-day, or the "ethical principle of economics," which finds its way at times into ethical programmes?

As a help to considering this question, let us think for a moment about the distinction between a science and an art.

A science has knowledge for its purpose. The subject-matter of a science is single, coherent, and shaped by an inevitable logical growth. An art has practice for its purpose; the matter with which it deals is many-sided, and falls in the province not of one, but of many sciences, from each of which the art borrows, without any rule beyond practical necessity, such information as may throw light on the particular cases submitted to it.

An art deals always with particular given cases. A science cannot deal with a particular given case as given; it demands, like a superior court, that the case should be stated, and answered hypothetically, assuming the truth of this general or hypothetical statement. Therefore you can no more go straight from ethical science to social or economical practice than you can from physiological science to medical practice. We all saw, but the other day, how ludicrous in the eyes of an illustrious physiologist appeared the notion entertained by an abstract thinker that medicine was the deductive application of physiology.

There may be, or might be, an ethical art related to ethical science as medicine to physiology. The art of the catholic director of consciences was intended for an art of this kind; and in a lesser degree it is one, no doubt, which in going through life we all exercise, well or badly. What in such an art we especially need is experience of life and insight into the particular case before us. "I wish," a friend may say, "to provide allotments, at my private expense, for the labourers of my native county; is not this well?" "How good of you; how altruistic," the ethical scientist must reply, if he is fool enough to judge from the case as laid before him. But it may be that the ethical man of art, who knows a thing or two, might rather feel impelled to ask, with some suspicion, "Were they not saying something about your standing for the county next year?" A timely question of this kind is about the best that ethical art will do for us.

But, to be serious, I do feel obliged to speak strongly upon the direct application to life of abstract formulæ. When I hear of its being a question of "justice," how much a man should be paid *per* hour, or how the land of the country should be held, I feel a positive sense of horror. I *know* that nothing can result from such a point of view, except that any forthcoming prejudice or superstition is withdrawn from reasonable criticism and embodied in a fanatical creed. The superior morality of a form of land-tenure or of a special economic arrangement seems to me a superstition which precisely takes rank with that of the divine institution of private property. I have seen somewhere, in these discussions, the phrase "abstract justice." If ethics has a word to say on the subject, it is that abstract justice is a very well-chosen formula to express what is necessarily unjust.

Justice is a concrete, the condition produced by a reasonable organisation of society. Plato ought surely to have taught the world thus much in two thousand years.

Speaking generally, then, I am strongly of opinion that to confuse ideas about morality with moral ideas is a very dangerous thing. I would never, for example, tell people that there is a standard which they ought to follow, and a sanction which they ought to value. As a general rule, perplexities of conscience are avoided by living out one's own life and attempting always rather to enlarge one's point of view organically than to vary it capriciously.

Thus, taking ethical ideas to mean ideas about morality, and moral ideas to be leading ideas in life, I should direct myself to communicating, as a rule, moral ideas, and not ideas about morality.

I am very well aware that in an intellectual age this distinction is not absolute, but the nature of science makes it certain that the distinction will always exist.

The idea, for example, that it is especially desirable to feel good, or to feel bad, is an idea about morality; the idea of a particular good thing to be done is a moral idea. Any formula of justice, such as equality or merit or need, is, standing by itself, an idea about morality; the conception of some definitely possible good life is a moral idea. The idea that self-sacrifice is virtuous is an idea about morality; that conception of his particular task for which a man will "scorn delights and live laborious days" is a moral idea. The idea that the will is free when the man is good is an idea about morality; but the will can only be liberated by the apprehension of particular moral ideas.

Ideas about morality, then, are the abstract or scientific renderings of moral ideas. They have value both as an element of the great fabric of knowledge, which is one of man's characteristic achievements, and as a clue which may help us in framing a distinct and organised conception of our moral environment. But we do not adequately realise that the clue is not the organised conception, and may even be a hindrance to it. The way of methodic science is a long way, and its half-way houses are unsatisfactory. Many and many a soul has died of spiritual hunger in the midst of spiritual plenty, because these aids to vision prevented him from using his eyes. The result of all science and philosophy is to see things as they are, and he has done himself a very evil turn who has gone up into the abstract world and has not come down again. "I suppose you mean the great philosophers," it will be said. Oh, no, I do not; they know their way in both worlds safe enough. I mean the small philosophers, such as we are ourselves, when, in our very aspiration after the general form, we lose our hold of the particular substance. I do feel that in this ethical movements, we are not free from this risk, which has been the pitfall of what is commonly known as Christian philanthropy. To the general aspiration, "I want to do good," the first answer is, "Then live out your own life thoroughly and intelligently." It is right in one's leisure time, or if one has no peremptory private duties, to find a sphere for work such as ours in guilds and schools and lecturing. But I most earnestly believe that the fault of the present time is, on the whole, distraction, and that one great cause of this distraction is the notion of a general duty to do good, as something other than and apart from doing one's work well and intelligently. Now, do we not think, if we are honest with ourselves, that in reforming or preaching or volunteer teaching, or making schemes for moral crusades, we are doing something of a higher class than is done by those hard-worked ordinary persons who teach for money in schools and colleges, or organise or practise industry, or write books and newspapers? Well, I say no; it is they, and those of us who work like them, who carry the world on their shoulders, and the moral atmosphere of whose endeavours is the true medium of the communication of moral ideas. And if, in talking about doing good, we divert our forces or our insight from our own work, and allow this to have the sin of haste and imperfection, which by universal consent characterises the work of to-day, then I say that our ideas *about morality* have become an absolute hindrance to our apprehension of *moral ideas.* I will not labour this point longer, although every year I feel it more and more strongly. I will sum it up simply in a question. Are we quite sure that we give due ethical importance to thoroughness and intelligence, which involve finish and organisation, in ordinary work, when it appears careless or even contemptuous of the stock-phrases of morality? Do we quite realise, for example, how, for all educated persons in the world, the idea of duty must have been deepened by that most cynical but splendidly laborious of historical writings—Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"?

Is there any way, then, by which moral ideas as distinct from ideas about morality, can be directly communicated?

How can *ideas* be directly communicated at all? We often think communication much easier than it is. I take an example which is a very extreme and a very striking one. Money, in the shape of actual coin, is readily transferable. We are therefore apt to think that those things, for the sake of which we desire money, are transferable no less readily.

This gives rise to what experts call the carcase theory of benevolence. There, we think, is the mass of well-being; you have only to cut a piece off and give it to the first comer, and it will be well with him. Not at all; you can do nothing whatever of the kind. In giving him money you are applying an external stimulus to his life. How that life will react to the stimulus depends upon itself. Practically, it may be said, you cannot transfer even money—that is to say, you cannot certainly transfer the normal and ordinary benefits which we associate with the possession of money.

And if it is hard to transfer money, what must it be to communicate ideas? Not to discourage us, but to elevate our notions of our task, I want to be allowed to say freely what I feel about this.

What is an idea? An image, like a photograph, that you can take out of a box when you hear its name? No, I do not think it is at all like that. An idea is a complex but definite habit and effort of thinking; to apprehend an idea requires, in varying measure, courage, strength, practice, skill, and, above all, patience. If we sometimes compared the task of communicating ideas with such tasks as teaching a man to skate, or to run a mile in four minutes and a half, or to sketch from nature, we should be saved from some at least of our errors. The reason why *I* cannot use the differential calculus is, on the whole, the same as the reason for which I cannot play the violin. Both of these activities require skilled and sustained effort of a kind which I have never learned to make, and which now, probably, I could not learn to make. Luckily, not all ideas are as hard to grasp as the calculus, and not all efforts need, like the musician's employment, a very special bodily endowment. But all ideas whatever present difficulties of apprehension such as are presented by these. An idea is a portion of life, and you must not hold it cheaper. The carcase theory of knowledge—the theory that ideas are stowed away in a sort of bank and it is stingy not to distribute them—is as common and as fatal as the carcase theory of well-being.

And, then, a "*moral* idea!"—that is, a set of familiar facts thoroughly grasped and realised in a point of view which makes them a leading interest in life,—that *is* a hard thing to communicate. Contagion, I said, is always communicating moral ideas; and contagion, perhaps, after all said and done, remains the only certain way.

Aristotle says somewhere, in one of those crushing sentences that make one doubt whether it was worth while to live after that great man, " It is one thing to repeat the formulæ of knowledge, and quite another thing to possess the knowledge." I think we sometimes suppose that moral ideas have been communicated to us when they have not. I am not a revivalist preacher; but the test question, to ascertain whether we have or have not apprehended moral ideas, is pretty much the same that such a preacher would ask his congregation if he wanted to know how their souls were getting on. What can one do now that one could not do before? Does one enjoy better books? Does one care more for true thoughts or for beautiful things? Has one a deeper hold of one's civic or neighbourly duties, of one's family or parental responsibilities, of one's humanity as embodied in one's daily work? If no change of this kind has taken place, then one may have been much interested or excited, and may have participated in a certain ethical dissipation, but one has not apprehended any moral ideas. "Active impressions," said Bishop Butler, "by being repeated, become stronger; passive impressions, by being repeated, become weaker." The terms seem incorrect; but the sentence expresses a fact.

However, we do not want discouragement, but encouragement; so reminding ourselves, in another Greek saying, that "great things are hard," we will approach the problem itself with the help of a comparison or two.

I spoke of a difficult mathematical idea, that of the differential calculus. None of us here, if we have not been trained in the subject, would find it at all easy, or worth our while in later life, to apprehend that idea in a workman-like way. Nor, again, should we for the most part be justified in devoting the time and labour which would be needed to make us thoroughly expert political economists or thoroughly competent biologists. The ideas of mathematics, of political economy, and of biology must, therefore, as systematic and complete ideas in these sciences, remain, as a rule, beyond our reach. But if we ask whether mathematical or economical or biological conceptions are wholly without meaning for us, and without influence on our lives, why that, I think, we should deny. Helmholtz, Clifford, Mill, Jevons, and Darwin have very deeply influenced the intellectual life of our age, and half directly and half indirectly of all of us here. We have learned from them probably not so much as we think, but certainly something. They, or others following them, have applied their great ideas to the organisation of experiences which come home to us, and to the definition of relations which lie within our ken. Some one, perhaps, has even demonstrated to us some simple physical relations of sound, or some contrivances tending to self-preservation in a plant, or the statement and refutation of the antiquated wage-fund theory. And, besides this, all our experience in daily life is unconsciously organised or crystallised in new shapes, embodying and revealing the new points of view as they gradually permeate life.

We may thus form some guess, I think, what sort of thing to aim at and to expect in the communication of moral ideas.

I must interrupt myself here to recall what I said about contagion. The talker is, I think, very much more likely to get moral ideas from the busy men he talks to than they are to get them from him. But we agreed to assume, this evening, that there is to be talking, and the only question is how it may be made most useful. And we must remember that the talker or teacher may be of use, if only by interpreting back to his hearers those very moral ideas which he has gained from them. Moreover, it will be seen, from what I am going to say, that the most useful teacher for our purpose is not so much a man of abstract theory as a man of reasonable experience. Theory also, of course, is one work among others.

Now, in throwing out suggestions about our function in the way under discussion, I want to put before us what, in one sense, though not in all, is the hardest case. Let us assume, as it was suggested to me by some remarks of Dr. Coit that I should assume, that our audience consisted less than it does of reflective and leisured people, and more of men and women whose lives permit but little book-learning and are hard throughout and liable to extreme hardship. Have we, it was asked of me, anything to say to these? Is not the Statement of the Society to which I belong (Report, p. I), "The good life has a claim upon us in virtue of its supreme worthiness, and this claim is the highest it can have," easier to people who have from time to time a spare afternoon and a spare shilling, which in modern London means a good deal of enjoyment, than it is to those who never attain this combination of resources? And is it not still harder, if they have at times to see, in those dearest to them, an artificial want and suffering in excess of the ordinary ills of life which we all have to endure as we may? Have we, in short, a message for the many as well as for the few? I might be interrupted with the outcry, "These things ought not to be borne, and you should not persuade people to bear them." To this I answer with an old Scotch proverb: "He that *tholes*, overcomes." ("He that endures, overcomes.") The spirit that endures, as a man and not as a slave, is the spirit that conquers. While the world lasts, patience will be the foundation of courage.

Well, then, we are not going to tell them about a pleasant future life, nor about a special interposition that will help the good in distress. Our experience is quite different from that of King David, who had never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging their bread. Yet candour compels me here to blunt my rhetoric by saying that genuine righteousness, on the whole, does not *tend* to beggary.

Is an ethical maxim, that worthy life is sufficient for itself, real and helpful for the many? Would you go into the cottage of the poor family, whose father and breadwinner had just been killed by an accident, and read to them out of our programme that "the good life has a claim upon us," etc? or, if a man in the thirteenth week of a strike came in here to listen to us, would you expect him to be much edified?

Let us try to look at this matter neither cynically nor sentimentally, but with the truth of both these moods, and of our own standpoint. We are not to forget that "fine words butter no parsnips," while we are also to remember that in trouble, as in humble station, "a man's a man for a' that." I mean that he has in him something strong and sympathetic, which dies hard even under crushing misfortune.

Should we then begin reading No. 1 of our statement of principles to any one in hardship or in distress? I suppose not. I imagine that our own principles would forbid it. Morality is life, and you cannot plant a strange life in a man by force, and all in a moment. As Plato tells us, you must make it grow from within.

First, then, just because our method is true and not false, it is slow, and ought to be begun in time. Everything is curable, O. W. Holmes has said, if you call the doctor soon enough; but "soon enough," he continues, might be two hundred years before the patient's birth; and people seldom fetch the doctor so soon as that. I admit that it is harder for *us* to pacify "the first strong burst of anguish," in a mind wholly new to our ideas, than it is for one who has at command the wonted anodyne. We look to moral prevention rather than to moral cure, and to moral cure rather than to moral anæsthesia.

But, secondly, as I have tried to urge throughout, our work is based upon our principles, but does not consist in giving our principles as pills. What is our most general principle? I suppose, from our statement, it is the sufficiency of humanity. What is our duty, then, to the suffering, the ignorant, the unleisured? Why, I suppose, to enter into their lives and to make their own humanity appeal to them. Even respect and natural human courtesy do something; contagion, I repeat, is the real thing. Honest and intelligent sympathy does more, and does so much that I almost retract, as regards our most gifted workers, what I admitted above. I am acquainted, I think, with persons of our opinion, who never for a moment tampering with the truth, would be as much valued in any sick-room, or in face of any calamity, as the best provided minister of soothing illusions. A sensible person, if sympathetic, is always a rock to lean upon. At least, that is my experience.

Thirdly, much of the accustomed form of consolation is even now quite unreal. The ministers of religion are generally good men; and it is largely the good man's unconscious humanity, and not the form of its expression, often wholly unintelligible, which comforts and strengthens. I note one further point: his official position makes him the representative of the general sympathy. A strong consciousness of solidarity is needed to compensate for this feeling. For most of the poorer class in our town, however, the accustomed form of consolation is already known to be valueless.

But passing from these most extreme cases, which always demand some special qualities in those who deal with them, and in which the sufferer is destitute of the reasonable habits of mind which give solid human strength, let us think of the more general question, "What message have we for the working man or woman?"

The general form of the answer must be that which we have given above; our message, as we deliver it, cannot be the *idea about morality*, which is expressed by saying that humanity is sufficient for itself; it must be rather those moral ideas by which, in the various ranks and phases of life, humanity is made to feel and to be in very truth sufficient for itself.

I once asked a great philosophical teacher, "Am I not right, sir, in thinking that you are influenced by the categories of Hegel?" "Yes," he replied, "they are very useful things; but one need not tell everybody that one uses them." He was not thinking of any concealment, of course, but merely of not puzzling people with abstractions. And so, even if you use ideas about morality, you need not show them except to such people as may be interested to see them. What *must* be communicated is a point of view worked out in life, and in some particular form of life which those whom you wish to help will recognise as their own. Take as an example the modern ethical doctrine of the freedom of the will, which I may state broadly in the abstract form, "A man is free when he has found himself in his moral environment." To make men and women realise this cardinal condition of their humanity, you must not talk about *it*, but you must talk about the facts in which it has its truth *for them*. I should think that if, as I hope, the parents of some of the little children in our

Infant School come next week to see what goes on there, *they* would receive some elements of the organised view of life corresponding to this "idea about morality." That is to say, they would see, and perhaps be told, in simple language, by ladies to whom this education is a heartfelt reality, how the child is being helped to grow and act, and in growing and acting, to be spontaneous and yet orderly. Even marching to music is, in its degree, and for young children, an object-lesson in moral freedom. It is finding satisfaction in doing a thing rightly, finding yourself in the order of the world. I know very well that people do not take in these ideas all at once. Rome was not built in a day. But let them once be interested, and they will soon catch hold of the free and happy humanity that is brought out in their children. And of course the whole of life can be treated in such a way as this, and, moreover, its range can, though most gradually, be extended.

But, above all things, the knowledge and experience must be real and vital. You must not take it into your head to illustrate free will, and get up the subject of infant schools to do it with. That is scamped work, and must produce a bad moral impression. You must have really entered into the faith of the sufficiency of humanity in that particular form in which you were to treat of it. And then, gradually, the organised life which forms your moral ideas will grow up in the minds of those with whom you are in contact, and then, “though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down.” For they will have laid hold on reality, on the true value of life.

The fatal home-sickness of the Swiss or the Scotch Highlander, touching and romantic as it may be, is ascribed, not without justice, to the simple singleness of his hold on reality. The single root is cut, and the tree withers. A man’s power of endurance is measured by the depth and fulness of his life, and it is the communication of such a fulness in the shape of moral ideas—that is, of intelligent interests—which constitutes, I suppose, our message to the poor.

Need the ethical teacher himself have reflective ideas about morality? My own conviction would lead me to answer in the negative. Thorough moral ideas, in some department of life, are the indispensable condition. Truth agrees with truth, and a reasonable man, with sound experience in important matters of knowledge or of practice, will be able to communicate something of the order and grasp of his own moral organisation. Any one who has had the good fortune to be gradually trained in some complex perception, as, for instance, the perception of beauty, by the teaching of other minds more gifted than his own, has a fair example of the process which I understand by the phrase, communication of moral ideas. It is not to create new things; it is not to dig up hidden things; it is merely to open our eyes and hearts that we may see and feel things as they are. It is incredible, I think, to the very young or inexperienced how the pictures in a gallery, or the poems in a book, gradually through long years, as our point of view becomes truer, are transformed from mere paint and canvas, and words and rhymes, into living meanings and spiritual symbols. Just so, and just as incredibly to those who think they see already all that common life can show, do the simple and familiar facts of life change their perspective and their grouping and their value, and become instinct with significance, and grapple us with an ever-new reality.

For my own part, then, I feel no hesitation whatever about the question that was put to me. What may become in the future of any particular society I do not know. But that moral ideas are the essence of humanity, and can be *awakened* to consciousness *in*—this is a better phrase than *communicated to*—all in whom humanity is still alive, I entertain no shade nor shadow of a doubt. Nor do I doubt that the condition of success is to envisage life in its fulness without sacrificing its organisation, so that to all sorts and conditions of men their own humanity, which alone can do them good, may be interpreted. From the nature of this work it is plain that mankind cannot, as one used to think, be saved by one man nor by one society. All that we can do is to take the portion of work or of teaching that lies within our individual range and try to make it thorough and reasonable. Patience and thoroughness are, I think, the chief watchwords in the communication of moral ideas. Failure generally means indolence or superficiality or narrowness.

What we are to do, I take it, is in the first place, to live our own lives out solidly and rationally, and, in the second place, to procure such utterances and such teaching as naturally arise from reasonable and energetic minds thoroughly versed in the various relations of humanity. And so living and so teaching, whether in or out of an Ethical Society, we shall be communicating moral ideas in their true form as growing germs of life. And although I am no advocate for quasi-religious proselytism, or for the multiplication of new societies, yet I see clearly that in the interval now before us, until a free humanism shall become the spirit of the civilised world, it may be well for men and women to band themselves together in holding up the banner of such a humanism for the help and encouragement of the isolated. And undoubtedly in so doing it may fall to their lot, by plain sense and true-heartedness, both of word and deed, to bring reasonable activity and reasonable faith within the reach of courageous spirits struggling in solitude. This is a meaning which might be found in those splendid verses that draw the moral of Goethe's *Faust*, putting into the song of the angels in paradise something more appropriate to plain men and women on earth :—

"We rescue from the evil one
This spirit high and brave ;
Who still aspires and labours on,
Him we have power to save."

There is no magic in the matter, you see ; every soul must save itself; but between it and others there is no unfathomable gulf, and life, like everything else, can be communicated. We have to see to it that the life which we are communicating is solid and sound. Half-culture, half-insight, half-devotion, half-conviction are the insidious enemies of our work. The spirit in which moral ideas have their being, and by which alone they can be communicated, is expressed in the familiar motto of the "strong, much-toiling sage," whose name I have just mentioned :—

> "And I vowed it, then and there,
> Vowed all halfness to forswear,
> In the whole, the good, the fair,
> Resolutely living."

THE AIMS OF ETHICAL SOCIETIES

LESLIE STEPHEN

I AM about to say a few words upon the aims of this Society: and I should be sorry either to exaggerate or to depreciate our legitimate pretensions. It would be altogether impossible to speak too strongly of the importance of the great questions in which our membership of the Society shows us to be interested. It would, I fear, be easy enough to make an overestimate of the part which we can expect to play in their solution. I hold indeed, or I should not be here, that we may be of some service at any rate to each other. I think that anything which stimulates an active interest in the vital problems of the day deserves the support of all thinking men; and I propose to consider briefly some of the principles by which we should be guided in doing whatever we can to promote such an interest.

We are told often enough that we are living in a period of important intellectual and social revolutions. In one way we are perhaps inclined even to state the fact a little too strongly. We suffer at times from the common illusion that the problems of to-day are entirely new: we fancy that nobody ever thought of them before, and that when we have solved them, nobody will ever need to look for another solution. To ardent reformers in all ages it seems as if the millennium must begin with their triumph, and that their triumph will be established by a single victory. And while some of us are thus sanguine, there are many who see in the struggles of to-day the approach of a deluge which is to sweep away all that once ennobled life. The believer in the old creeds, who fears that faith is decaying, and the supernatural life fading from the world, denounces the modern spirit as materialising and degrading. The conscience of mankind, he thinks, has become drugged and lethargic; our minds are fixed upon sensual pleasures, and our conduct regulated by a blind struggle for the maximum of luxurious enjoyment. The period in his eyes is a period of growing corruption; modern society suffers under a complication of mortal diseases, so widely spread and deeply seated that at present there is no hope of regeneration. The best hope is that its decay may provide the soil in which seed may be sown of a far-distant growth of happier augury. Such dismal forebodings are no novelty. Every age produces its prophecies of coming woes. Nothing would be easier than to make out a catena of testimonies from great men at every stage of the world's history, declaring each in turn that the cup of iniquity was now at last overflowing, and that corruption had reached so unprecedented a step that some great catastrophe must be approaching. A man of unusually lofty morality is, for that reason, more keenly sensitive to the lowness of the average standard, and too easily accepts the belief that the evils before his eyes must be in fact greater, and not, as may perhaps be the case, only more vividly perceived, than those of the bygone ages. A call to repentance easily takes the form of an assertion that the devil is getting the upper hand ; and we may hope that the pessimist view is only a form of the discontent which is a necessary condition of improvement. Anyhow, the diametrical conflict of prophecies suggests one remark which often impresses me. We are bound to call each other by terribly hard names. A gentleman assures me in print that I am playing the devil's game ; depriving my victims, if I have any, of all the beliefs that can make life noble or happy, and doing my best to destroy the very first principles of morality. Yet I meet my adversary in the flesh, and find that he treats me not only with courtesy, but with no inconsiderable amount of sympathy. He admits —by his actions and his argument—that I—the miserable sophist and seducer—have not only some good impulses, but have really something to say which deserves a careful and respectful answer. An infidel, a century or two ago, was supposed to have forfeited all claim to the ordinary decencies of life. Now I can say, and can say with real satisfaction, that I do not find any difference of creed, however vast in words, to be an obstacle to decent and even friendly treatment. I am at times tempted to ask whether my opponent can be quite logical in being so courteous; whether, if he is as sure as he says that I am in the devil's service, I ought not, as a matter of duty, to be encountered with the old dogmatism and arrogance. I shall, however, leave my friends of a different way of thinking to settle that point for themselves. I cannot doubt the sincerity of their courtesy, and I will hope that it is somehow consistent with their logic. Rather I will try to meet them in a corresponding spirit by a brief confession. I have often enough spoken too harshly and vehemently of my antagonists. I have tried to fix upon them too unreservedly what seemed to me the logical consequences of their dogmas. I have condemned their attempts at a milder interpretation of their creed as proofs of insincerity, when I ought to have done more justice to the legitimate and lofty motives which prompted them. And I at least am bound by my own views to admit that even the antagonist from whose utterances I differ most widely may be an unconscious ally, supplementing rather than contradicting my theories, and in great part moved by aspirations which I ought to recognise even when allied with what I take to be defective reasoning. We are all amenable to one great influence. The vast shuttle of modern life is weaving together all races and creeds and classes. We are no longer shut up in separate compartments, where the mental horizon is limited by the area visible from the parish steeple ; each little section can no longer fancy, in the old childish fashion, that its own arbitrary prejudices and dogmas are parts of the eternal order of things ; or infer that in the indefinite region beyond, there live nothing but monsters and anthropophagi, and men whose heads grow beneath their shoulders. The annihilation of space has made us fellows as by a kind of mechanical compulsion ; and every advance of knowledge has increased the impossibility of taking our little Church—little in comparison with mankind, be it even as great as the Catholic Church—for the one pattern of right belief. The first effect of bringing remote nations and classes into closer contact is often an explosion of antipathy ; but in the long run it means a development of human sympathy. Wide, therefore, as is the opposition of opinions as to what is the true theory of the world—as to which is the divine and which the diabolical element—I fully believe that beneath the war of words and dogmas there is a growth of genuine toleration, and, we must hope, of ultimate conciliation.

This is manifest in another direction. The Churches are rapidly making at least one discovery. They are beginning to find out that their vitality depends, not upon success in theological controversy, but upon their success in meeting certain social needs and aspirations common to all classes. It is simply impossible for any thinking man at the present day to take any living interest, for example, in the ancient controversies. The " drum ecclesiastic " of the seventeenth century would sound a mere lullaby to us. Here and there a priest or a belated dissenting minister may amuse himself by threshing out once more the old chaff of dead and buried dogmas. There are people who can argue gravely about baptismal regeneration or apostolical succession. Such doctrines were once alive, no doubt, because they represented the form in which certain still living problems had then to present themselves. They now require to be stated in a totally different shape, before we can even guess why they were once so exciting, or how men could have supposed their modes of attacking the question to be adequate. The Pope and General Booth still condemn each other's tenets; and in case of need would, I suppose, take down the old rusty weapons from the armoury. But each sees with equal clearness that the real stress of battle lies elsewhere. Each tries, after his own fashion, to give a better answer than the Socialists to the critical problems of to-day. We ought so far to congratulate both them and ourselves on the direction of their energies. Nay, can we not even co-operate, and put these hopeless controversies aside? Why not agree to differ about the questions which no one denies to be all but insoluble, and become allies in promoting morality? Enormous social forces find their natural channel through the Churches; and if the beliefs inculcated by the Church were not, as believers assert, the ultimate cause of progress, it is at least clear that they were not incompatible with progress. The Church, we all now admit, whether by reason of or in spite of its dogmatic creed, was for ages one great organ of civilisation, and still exercises an incalculable influence. Why, then, should we, who cannot believe in the dogmas, yet fall into line with believers for practical purposes? Churches insist verbally upon the importance of their dogma: they are bound to do so by their logical position; but, in reality, for them, as for us, the dogma has become in many ways a mere excrescence—a survival of barren formulæ which do little harm to anybody. Carlyle, in his quaint phrase, talked about the exodus from Houndsditch, but doubted whether it were yet time to cast aside the Hebrew old clothes. They have become threadbare and antiquated. That gives a reason to the intelligent for abandoning them; but, also, perhaps a reason for not quarrelling with those who still care to masquerade in them. Orthodox people have made a demand that the Board Schools should teach certain ancient doctrines about the nature of Christ; and the demand strikes some of us as preposterous if not hypocritical. But putting aside the audacity of asking unbelievers to pay for such teaching, one might be tempted to ask, what harm could it really do? Do you fancy for a moment that you can really teach a child of ten the true meaning of the Incarnation? Can you give him more than a string of words as meaningless as magical formulæ? I was brought up at the most orthodox of Anglican seminaries. I learned the Catechism, and heard lectures upon the Thirty-nine Articles. I never found that the teaching had ever any particular effect upon my mind. As I grew up, the obsolete exuviæ of doctrine dropped off my mind like dead leaves from a tree. They could not get any vital hold in an atmosphere of tolerable enlightenment. Why should we fear the attempt to instil these fragments of decayed formulæ into the minds of children of tender age? Might we not be certain that they would vanish of themselves? They are superfluous, no doubt, but too futile to be of any lasting importance. I remember that, when the first Education Act was being discussed, mention was made of a certain Jew who not only sent his son to a Christian school, but insisted upon his attending all the lessons. He had paid his fees, he said, for education in the Gospels among other things, and he meant to have his money's worth. "But your son," it was urged, "will become a Christian." "I," he replied, "will take good care of that at home." Was not the Jew a man of sense? Can we suppose that the mechanical repetition of a few barren phrases will do either harm or good? As the child develops he will, we may hope, remember his multiplication table, and forget his fragments of the Athanasian Creed. Let the wheat and tares be planted together, and trust to the superior vitality of the more valuable plant. The sentiment might be expressed sentimentally as easily as cynically. We may urge, like many sceptics of the last century, that Christianity should be kept "for the use of the poor," and renounced in the esoteric creed of the educated. Or we may urge the literary and æsthetic beauty of the old training, and wish it to be preserved to discipline the imagination, though we may reject its value as a historical statement of fact.

The audience which I am addressing has, I presume, made up its mind upon such views. They come too late. It might have been a good thing, had it been possible, to effect the transition from old to new without a violent convulsion: good, if Christian conceptions had been slowly developed into more simple forms; if the beautiful symbols had been retained till they could be impregnated with a new meaning; and if the new teaching of science and philosophy had gradually percolated into the ancient formulæ without causing a disruption. Possibly the Protestant Reformation was a misfortune, and Erasmus saw the truth more clearly than Luther. I cannot go into might-have-beens. We have to deal with facts. A conspiracy of silence is impossible about matters which have been vehemently discussed for centuries. We have to take sides; and we at least have agreed to take the side of the downright thinker, who will say nothing that he does not believe, and hide nothing that he does believe, and speak out his mind without reservation or economy and accommodation. Indeed, as things are, any other course seems to me to be impossible. I have spoken, for example, of General Booth. Many people heartily admire his schemes of social reform, and have been willing to subscribe for its support, without troubling themselves about his theology. I will make no objection; but I confess that I could not therefore treat that theology as either morally or intellectually respectable. It has happened to me once or twice to listen to expositions from orators of the Salvation Army. Some of them struck me as sincere though limited, and others as the victims of an overweening vanity. The oratory, so far as I could hear, consisted in stringing together an endless set of phrases about the blood of Christ, which if they really meant anything, meant a doctrine as low in the intellectual scale as that of any of the objects of missionary enterprise. The conception of the transactions between God and man was apparently modelled upon the dealings of a petty tradesman. The "blood of Christ" was regarded like the panacea of a quack doctor, which will cure the sins of anybody who accepts the prescription. For anything I can say, such a creed may be elevating—relatively; elevating as slavery is said to have been elevating when it was a substitute for extermination. The hymns of the Army may be better than public-house melodies, and the excitement produced less mischievous than that due to gin. But the best that I can wish for its adherents is, that they should speedily reach a point at which they could perceive their doctrines to be debasing. I hope, indeed, that they do not realise their own meaning; but I could almost as soon join in some old pagan ceremonies, gash my body with knives, or swing myself from a hook, as indulge in this variety of spiritual intoxication.

There are, it is true, plenty of more refined and intellectual preachers, whose sentiments deserve at least the respect due to tender and humane feeling. They have found a solution, satisfactory to themselves, of the great dilemma which presses on so many minds. A religion really to affect the vulgar must be a superstition; to satisfy the thoughtful, it must be a philosophy. Is it possible to contrive so to fuse the crude with the refined as to make at least a working compromise? To me personally, and to most of us living at the present day, the enterprise appears to be impracticable. My own experience is, I imagine, a very common one. When I ceased to accept the teaching of my youth, it was not so much a process of giving up beliefs, as of discovering that I had never really believed. The contrast between the genuine convictions which guide and govern our conduct, and the professions which we were taught to repeat in church, when once realised, was too glaring. One belonged to the world of realities, and the other to the world of dreams. The orthodox formulæ represent, no doubt, a sentiment, an attempt to symbolise emotions which might be beautiful, or to indicate vague impressions about the tendency of things in general; but to put them side by side with real beliefs about facts was to reveal their flimsiness. The "I believe" of the creed seemed to mean something quite different from the "I believe" of politics and history and science. Later experience has only deepened and strengthened that feeling. Kind and loving and noble-minded people have sought to press upon me the consolations of their religion. I thank them in all sincerity; and I feel,—why should I not admit it?—that it may be a genuine comfort to set your melancholy to the old strain in which so many generations have embodied their sorrows and their aspirations. And yet to me, its consolation is an invitation to reject plain facts; to seek for refuge in a shadowy world of dreams and conjectures, which dissolve as you try to grasp them. The doctrine offered for my acceptance cannot be stated without qualifications and reserves and modifications, which make it as useless as it is vague and conjectural. I may learn in time to submit to the inevitable; I cannot drug myself with phrases which evaporate as soon as they are exposed to a serious test. You profess to give me the only motives of conduct; and I know that at the first demand to define them honestly—to say precisely what you believe and why you believe it—you will be forced to withdraw, and explain and evade, and at last retire to the safe refuge of a mystery, which might as well be admitted at starting. As I have read and thought, I have been more and more impressed with the obvious explanation of these observations. How should the beliefs be otherwise than shadowy and illusory, when their very substance is made of doubts laboriously and ingeniously twisted into the semblance of convictions? In one way or other that is the characteristic mark of the theological systems of the present day. Proof is abandoned for persuasion. The orthodox believer professed once to prove the facts which he asserted and to show that his dogmas expressed the truth. He now only tries to show that the alleged facts don't matter, and that the dogmas are meaningless. Nearly two centuries ago, for example, a deist pointed out that the writer of the Book of Daniel, like other people, must have written after the events which he mentioned. All the learned, down to Dr. Pusey, denounced his theory, and declared his argument to be utterly destructive of the faith. Now an orthodox professor will admit that the deist was perfectly right, and only tries to persuade himself that arguments from facts are superfluous. The supposed foundation is gone: the superstructure is not to be affected. What the keenest disputant now seeks to show is, not that the truth of the records can be established beyond reasonable doubt; but that no absolute contradiction in terms is involved in supposing that they correspond more or less roughly to something which may possibly have happened. So long as a thing is not proved false by mathematical demonstration, I may still continue to take it for a divine revelation, and to listen respectfully when experienced statesmen and learned professors assure me with perfect gravity that they can believe in Noah's flood or in the swine of Gadara. They have an unquestionable right to believe if they please: and they expect me to accept the facts for the sake of the doctrine. There, unluckily, I have a similar difficulty. It is the orthodox who are the systematic sceptics. The most famous philosophers of my youth endeavoured to upset the deist by laying the foundation of Agnosticism, arbitrarily tagged to an orthodox conclusion. They told me to believe a doctrine because it was totally impossible that I should know whether it was true or not, or indeed attach any real meaning to it whatever. The highest altar, as Sir W. Hamilton said, was the altar to the unknown and unknowable God. Others, seeing the inevitable tendency of such methods, have done their best to find in the Christian doctrine, rightly understood, the embodiment of the highest philosophy. It is the divine voice which speaks in our hearts, though it has caught some accretion of human passion and superstition. The popular versions are false and debased; the old versions of the Atonement, for example, monstrous; and the belief in the everlasting torture of sinners, a hideous and groundless caricature. With much that such men have said I could, of course, agree heartily; for, indeed, it expresses the strongest feelings which have caused religious revolt. But would it not be simpler to say, "the doctrine is not true," than to say, "it is true, but means just the reverse of what it was also taken to mean"? I prefer plain terms; and "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly" seems to be an awkward way of denying the endlessness of punishment. You cannot denounce the immorality of the old dogmas with the infidel, and then proclaim their infinite value with the believer. You defend the doctrine by showing that in its plain downright sense,—the sense in which it embodied popular imaginations,—it was false and shocking. The proposal to hold by the words evacuated of the old meaning is a concession of the whole case to the unbeliever, and a substitution of sentiment and aspiration for a genuine intellectual belief. Explaining away, however dexterously and delicately, is not defending, but at once confessing error, and encumbering yourself with all the trammels of misleading associations. The more popular method, therefore, at the present day is not to rationalise, but to try to outsceptic the sceptic. We are told that we have no solid ground from reason at all, and that even physical science is as full of contradictions as theology. Such enterprises, conducted with whatever ingenuity, are, as I believe, hopeless; but at least they are fundamentally and radically sceptical. That, under whatever disguises, is the true meaning of the Catholic argument, which is so persuasive to many. To prove the truth of Christianity by abstract reasoning may be hopeless; but nothing is easier than to persuade yourself to believe it, if once you will trust instinct in place of reason, and forget that instinct proves anything and everything. The success of such arguments with thoughtful men is simply a measure of the spread of scepticism. The conviction that truth is unattainable is the master argument for submitting to "authority." The "authority," in the scientific sense of any set of men who agree upon a doctrine, varies directly as their independence of each other. Their "authority" in the legal sense varies as the closeness of their mutual dependence. As the consent loses its value logically, it gains in power of coercion. And therefore it is easy to substitute drilling for arguing, and to take up a belief as you accept admission to a society, as a matter of taste and feeling, with which abstract logic has nothing to do. The common dilemma—you must be a Catholic or an atheist—means, that theology is only tenable if you drill people into belief by a vast organisation appealing to other than logical motives.

I do not argue these points: I only indicate what I take to be your own conviction as well as mine. It seems to me, in fact, that the present state of mind —if we look to men's real thoughts and actions, not to their conventional phrases—is easily definable. It is simply a tacit recognition that the old orthodoxy cannot be maintained either by the evidence of facts or by philosophical argument. It has puzzled me sometimes to understand why the Churches should insist upon nailing themselves down to the truth of their dogmas and their legendary history. Why cannot they say frankly, what they seem to be constantly on the verge of saying—Our dogmas and our history are not true, or not "true" in the historical or scientific sense of the word? To ask for such truth in the sphere of theology is as pedantic as to ask for it in the sphere of poetry. Poetical truth means, not that certain events actually happened, or that the poetical "machinery" is to be taken as an existing fact; but that the poem is, so to speak, the projection of truths upon the cloudland of imagination. It reflects and gives sensuous images of truth; but it is only the Philistine or the blockhead who can seriously ask, is it true? Some such position seems to be really conceivable as an ultimate compromise. Put aside the prosaic insistence upon literal matter-of-fact truth, and we may all agree to use the same symbolism, and interpret it as we please. This seems to me to be actually the view of many thoughtful people, though for obvious reasons it is not often explicitly stated. One reason is, of course, the consciousness that the great mass of mankind requires plain, tangible motives for governing its life; and if it once be admitted that so much of the orthodox doctrine is mere symbolism or adumbration of truths, the admission would involve the loss of the truths so indicated. Moral conduct, again, and moral beliefs are supposed to depend upon some affirmation of these truths; and excellent people are naturally shy of any open admission which may appear to throw doubt upon the ultimate grounds of morality.

Indeed, if it could be really proved that men have to choose between renouncing moral truth and accepting unproved theories, it might be right—I will not argue the point—to commit intellectual suicide. If the truth is that we are mere animals or mere automata, shall we sacrifice the truth, or sacrifice what we have at least agreed to call our higher nature? For us the dilemma has no force: for we do not admit the discrepancy. We believe that morality depends upon something deeper and more permanent than any of the dogmas that have hitherto been current in the Churches. It is a product of human nature, not of any of these transcendental speculations or faint survivals of traditional superstitions. Morality has grown up independently of, and often in spite of, theology. The creeds have been good so far as they have accepted or reflected the moral conviction; but it is an illusion to suppose that they have generated it. They represent the dialect and the imagery by which moral truths have been conveyed to minds at certain stages of thought; but it is a complete inversion of the truth to suppose that the morality sprang out of them. From this point of view we must of necessity treat the great ethical questions independently. We cannot form a real alliance with thinkers radically opposed to us. Divines tell us that we reject the one possible basis of morality. To us it appears that we are strengthening it, by severing it from a connection with doctrines arbitrary, incapable of proof, and incapable of retaining any consistent meaning. Theologians once believed that hell-fire was the ultimate sentence, and persecution the absolute duty of every Christian ruler. The Churches which once burnt and exterminated are now only anxious to proclaim freedom of belief, and to cast the blame of persecution upon their rivals. Divines have discovered that the doctrine of hell-fire deserves all that infidels have said of it; and a member of Dante's Church was arguing the other day that hell might on the whole be a rather pleasant place of residence. Doctrines which can thus be turned inside out are hardly desirable bases for morality. So the early Christians, again, were the Socialists of their age, and took a view of Dives and Lazarus which would commend itself to the Nihilists of to-day. The Church is now often held up to us as the great barrier against Socialism, and the one refuge against subversive doctrines. In a well-known essay on "People whom one would have wished to have seen," Lamb and his friends are represented as agreeing that if Christ were to enter they would all fall down and worship Him. It may have been so; but if the man who best represents the ideas of early Christians were to enter a respectable society of to-day, would it not be more likely to send for the police? When we consider such changes, and mark in another direction how the dogmas which once set half the world to cut the throats of the other half, have sunk into mere combinations of hard words, can we seriously look to the maintenance of dogmas, even in the teeth of reason, as a guarantee for ethical convictions? What you call retaining the only base of morality, appears to us to be trying to associate morality with dogmas essentially arbitrary and unreasonable.

From this point of view it is naturally our opinion that we should promote all thorough discussion of great ethical problems in a spirit and by methods which are independent of the orthodox dogmas. There are many such problems undoubtedly of the highest importance. The root of all the great social questions of which I have spoken lies in the region of Ethics; and upon that point, at least, we can go along with much that is said upon the orthodox side. We cannot, indeed, agree that Ethics can be adequately treated by men pledged to ancient traditions, employing antiquated methods, and always tempted to have an eye to the interest of their own creeds and Churches. But we can fully agree that ethical principles underlie all the most important problems. Every great religious reform has been stimulated by the conviction that the one essential thing is a change of spirit, not a mere modification of the external law, which has ceased to correspond to genuine beliefs and powerful motives. The commonest criticism, indeed, of all projectors of new Utopias is that they propose a change of human nature. The criticism really suggests a sound criterion. Unless the change proposed be practicable, the Utopia will doubtless be impossible. And unless some practicable change be proposed, the Utopia, even were it embodied in practice, would be useless. If the sole result of raising wages were an increase in the consumption of gin, wages might as well stay at a minimum. But the tacit assumption that all changes of human nature are impracticable is simply a cynical and unproved assertion. All of us here hold, I imagine, that human nature has in a sense been changed. We hold that, with all its drawbacks, progress is not an illusion; that men have become at least more tolerant and more humane; that ancient brutalities have become impossible; and that the suffering of the weaker excites a keener sympathy. To say that, in that sense human nature must be changed, is to say only that the one sound criterion of all schemes for social improvement lies in their ethical tendency. The standard of life cannot be permanently raised unless you can raise the standard of motive. Old-fashioned political theorists thought that a simple change of the constitutional machinery would of itself remedy all evils, and failed to recognise that behind the institutions lie all the instincts and capabilities of the men who are to work them. A similar fallacy is prevalent, I fancy, in regard to what we call social reforms. Some scheme for a new mode of distributing the products of industry would, it is often assumed, remedy all social evils. To my thinking, no such change would do more than touch the superficial evils, unless it had also some tendency to call out the higher and repress the lower impulses. Unless we can to some extent change "human nature," we shall be weaving ropes of sand, or devising schemes for perpetual motion, for driving our machinery more effectively without applying fresh energy. We shall be falling into the old blunders; approving Jack Cade's proposal—as recorded by Shakespeare—that the three-hooped pot should have seven hoops; or attempting to get rid of poverty by converting the whole nation into paupers. No one, perhaps, will deny this in terms; and to admit it frankly is to admit that every scheme must be judged by its tendency to "raise the manhood of the poor," and to make every man, rich and poor, feel that he is discharging a useful function in society. Old Robert Owen, when he began his reforms, rested his doctrine and his hopes of perfectibility upon the scientific application of a scheme for "the formation of character." His plans were crude enough, and fell short of success. But he had seen the real conditions of success; and when, in after years, he imagined that a new society might be made by simply collecting men of any character in a crowd, and inviting them to share alike, he fell into the inevitable failure. Modern Socialists might do well to remember his history.

Now it is, as I understand, primarily the aim of an Ethical Society to promote the rational discussion of these underlying ethical principles. We wish to contribute to the clearest understanding we can of the right ends to which human energy should be devoted, and of the conditions under which such devotion is most likely to be rewarded with success. We desire to see the great controversy carried on in the nearest possible approach to a scientific spirit. That phrase implies, as I have said, that we must abandon much of the old guidance. The lights by which our ancestors professed to direct their course are not for us supernatural signs, shining in a transcendental region, but at most the beacons which they had themselves erected, valuable as indications, though certainly not as infallible guides to the right path. We must question everything, and be prepared to modify or abandon whatever is untenable. We must be scientific in spirit, in so far as we must trust nothing but a thorough and systematic investigation of facts, however the facts may be interpreted. Undoubtedly, the course marked out is long and arduous. It is perfectly true, moreover, as our antagonists will hasten to observe, that professedly scientific reasoners are hardly better agreed than their opponents. If they join upon some negative conclusions, and upon some general principles of method, they certainly do not reach the same results. They have at present no definite creed to lay down. I need only refer, for example, to one very obvious illustration. The men who were most conspicuous for their attempt to solve social problems by scientific methods, and most confident that they had succeeded, were, probably, those who founded the so-called "classical" political economy, and represented what is now called the individualist point of view. Government, they were apt to think, should do nothing but stand aside, see fair-play, and keep our knives from each other's throats and our hands out of each other's pockets. Much as their doctrines were denounced, this view is still represented by the most popular philosopher of the day. And undoubtedly we shall do well to take to heart the obvious moral. If we still believe in the old-fashioned doctrines, we must infer that to work out a scientific doctrine is by no means to secure its acceptance. If we reject them we must argue that the mere claim to be scientific may inspire men with a premature self-confidence, which tends only to make their errors more systematic. When, however, I look at the actual course of controversy, I am more impressed by another fact. "Individualism" is sometimes met by genuine argument. More frequently, I think, it is met by simple appeal to sentiment. This kind of thing, we are told, is exploded; it is not up to date; it is as obsolete as the plesiosaurus; and therefore, without bothering ourselves about your reasoning, we shall simply neglect it. Talk as much as you please, we can get a majority on the other side. We shall disregard your arguments, and, therefore—it is a common piece of logic at the present day—your arguments must be all wrong. I must be content here with simply indicating my own view. I think, in fact, that, in this as in other cases, the true answer to extreme theorists would be very different. I hold that we would begin by admitting the immense value of the lesson taught by the old individualists, if that be their right name. If they were precipitate in laying down "iron laws" and proclaiming inexorable necessity, they were perfectly right in pointing out that there are certain "laws of human nature," and conditions of social welfare, which will not be altered by simply declaring them to be unpleasant. They did an inestimable service in emphatically protesting against the system of forcibly suppressing, or trying to suppress, deep-seated evils, without an accurate, preliminary diagnosis of the causes. And—not to go into remote questions—the "individualist" creed had this merit, which is related to our especial aims. The ethical doctrine which they preached may have had—I think that it had—many grave defects; but at least it involved a recognition of the truth which their opponents are too apt to shun or reject. They, at least, asserted strenuously the cardinal doctrine of the importance of individual responsibility. They might draw some erroneous inferences, but they could not put too emphatically the doctrine that men must not be taught to shift the blame of all their sufferings upon some mysterious entity called society, or expect improvement unless, among other virtues, they will cultivate the virtue of strenuous, unremitting, masculine self-help.

If this be at all true, it may indicate what I take to be the aim of our Society, or rather of us as members of an Ethical Society. We hold, that is, that the great problems of to-day have their root, so to speak, in an ethical soil. They will be decided one way or other by the view which we take of ethical questions. The questions, for example, of what is meant by social justice, what is the justification of private property, or the limits of personal liberty, all lead us ultimately to ethical foundations. The same is, of course, true of many other problems. The demand for political rights of women is discussed, rightly no doubt, upon grounds of justice, and takes us to some knotty points. Does justice imply the equality of the sexes; and if so, in what sense of "equality"? And, beyond this, we come to the question, What would be the bearing of our principles upon the institution of marriage, and upon the family bond? No question can be more important, or more vitally connected with Ethics. We, at any rate, can no longer answer such problems by any traditional dogmatism. They—and many other questions which I need not specify—have been asked, and have yet to be answered. They will probably not be answered by a simple yes or no, nor by any isolated solution of a metaphysical puzzle. Undoubtedly, a vast mass of people will insist upon being consulted, and will adopt methods which cannot be regarded as philosophical. Therefore, it is a matter of pressing importance that all people who can think at all should use their own minds, and should do their best to widen and strengthen the influence of the ablest thinkers. The chaotic condition of the average mind is our reason for trying to strengthen the influence, always too feeble, of the genuine thinkers. Much that passes itself off for thought is simply old prejudice in a new dress. Tradition has always this, indeed, to say for itself: that it represents the product of much unconscious reasoning from experience, and that it is at least compatible with such progress as has been hitherto achieved. Progress has in future to take place in the daylight, and under the stress of keen discussion from every possible point of view. It would be rash indeed to assume that we can hope to see the substitution of purely rational and scientific methods for the old hap-hazard and tentative blundering into slightly better things. It is possible enough that the creed of the future may, after all, be a compromise, admitting some elements of higher truth, but attracting the popular mind by concessions to superstition and ignorance. We can hardly hope to get rid of the rooted errors which have so astonishing a vitality. But we should desire, and, so far as in us lies, endeavour to secure the presence of the largest possible element of genuine and reasoned conviction in the faith of our own and the rising generation.

I have not sought to say anything new. I have only endeavoured to define the general position which we, as I imagine, have agreed to accept. We hold in common that the old dogmas are no longer tenable, though we are very far from being agreed as to what should replace them. We have each, I dare say, our own theory; we agree that our theories, whatever they may be, are in need of strict examination, of verification, it may be, but it may be also of modification or rejection. We hope that such Societies as this may in the first place serve as centres for encouraging and popularising the full and free discussion of the great questions. We wish that people who have reached a certain stage of cultivation should be made aware of the course which is being taken by those who may rightly claim to be in the van. We often wish to know, as well as we can, what is the direction of the deeper currents of thought; what genuine results, for example, have been obtained by historical criticism, especially as applied to the religious history of the world; we want to know what are the real points now at issue in the world of science; the true bearing of the theories of evolution, and so forth, which are known by name far beyond the circle in which their logical reasoning is really appreciated; we want to know, again, what are the problems which really interest modern metaphysicians or psychologists; in what directions there seems to be a real promise of future achievement, and in what directions it seems to be proved by experience that any further expansion of intellectual energy is certain to result only in the discovery of mares' nests.

Matthew Arnold would have expressed this by saying that we are required to be made accessible to the influence of the Zeitgeist. There is a difficulty, no doubt, in discovering by what signs we may recognise the utterances of the Zeitgeist; and distinguish between loyalty to the real intellectual leaders and a simple desire to be arrayed in the last new fashion in philosophy. There is no infallible sign; and, yet, a genuine desire to discover the true lines in which thought is developing is not of the less importance. Arnold, like others, pointed the moral by a contrast between England and Germany. The best that has been done in England, it is said, has generally been done by amateurs and outsiders. They have, perhaps, certain advantages, as being less afraid to strike into original paths, and even the originality of ignorance is not always, though it may be in nine cases out of ten, a name for fresh blundering. But if sporadic English writers have now and then hit off valuable thoughts, there can be no doubt that we have had a heavy price to pay. The comparative absence of any class, devoted, like German professors, to a systematic and combined attempt to spread the borders of knowledge and speculation, has been an evil which is the more felt in proportion as specialisation of science and familiarity with previous achievements become more important. It would be very easy to give particular instances of our backwardness. How different would have been the course of English Church history, said somebody, if Newman had only known German! He would have breathed a larger air, and might have desisted—I suppose that was the meaning—from the attempt to put life into certain dead bones. And with equal truth, it may be urged, how much better work might have been done by J. S. Mill if he had really read Kant! He might not have been converted, but he would have been saved from maintaining in their crude form doctrines which undoubtedly require modification. Under his reign, English thought was constantly busied with false issues, simply from ignorance of the most effective criticism. It is needless to point out how much time is wasted in the defence of positions that have long been turned by the enemy, from sheer want of acquaintance with the relevant evidence or with the logic that has been revealed by the slow thrashing out of thorough controversy. It would be invidious perhaps to insist too much upon another obvious result: the ease with which a man endowed with a gift of popular rhetoric, and a facility for catching at the current phrases, can set up as teacher, however palpable to the initiated may be his ignorance. Scientific thought has perhaps as much to fear from the false prophets who take its name as from the open enemies who try to stifle its voice. I would rather emphasise another point, perhaps less generally remarked. The study has its idols as well as the market place. Certain weaknesses are developed in the academical atmosphere as well as in the arenas of public discussion. Freeman used to say that English historians had avoided certain errors into which German writers of far greater knowledge and more thorough scholarship had fallen, simply because points were missed by a professor in a German university which were plain to those who, like many Englishmen, had to take a part in actual political work. I think that this is not without a meaning for us. We have learnt, very properly, to respect German research and industry; and we are trying in various directions to imitate their example. Perhaps it would be as well to keep an eye upon some German weaknesses. A philosophy made by professors is apt to be a philosophy for pedants. A professor is bound to be omniscient; he has to have an answer for everything; he is tempted to construct systems which will pass muster in the lecture-room, and to despise the test of their applicability to daily life. I confess myself to be old-fashioned enough to share some of the old English prejudices against those gigantic structures which have been thrown out by imposing philosophers, who evolved complete systems of metaphysics and logic and religion and politics and æsthetics out of their own consciousness. We have multiplied professors of late, and professors are bound to write books, and to magnify the value of their own studies. They must make a show of possessing an encyclopædic theory which will explain everything and take into account all previous theories. Sometimes, perhaps, they will lose themselves in endless subtleties and logomachies and construct cobwebs of the brain, predestined to the rubbish-heap of extinct philosophies. It is enough, however, to urge that a mere student may be the better for keeping in mind the necessity of keeping in mind real immediate human interests; as the sentimentalist has to be reminded of the importance of strictly logical considerations. And I think too that a very brief study of the most famous systems of old days will convince us that philosophers should be content with a more modest attitude than they have sometimes adopted; give up the pretensions to framing off-hand theories of things in general, and be content to puzzle out a few imperfect truths which may slowly work their way into the general structure of thought. I wish to speak humbly as befits one who cannot claim any particular authority for his opinion. But, in all humility, I suggest that if we can persuade men of reputation in the regions where subtle thought and accurate research are duly valued, we shall be doing good, not only to ourselves, but, if I may whisper it, to them. We value their attainments so highly that we desire their influence to spread beyond the narrow precinct of university lecture-rooms; and their thoughts to be, at the same time, stimulated and vitalised by bringing them into closer contact with the problems which are daily forced upon us in the business of daily life. A divorce between the men of thought and the men of action is really bad for both. Whatever tends to break up the intellectual stupor of large classes, to rouse their minds, to increase their knowledge of the genuine work that is being done, to provide them even with more of such recreations as refine and invigorate, must have our sympathy, and will be useful both to those who confer and to those who receive instruction. So, after all, a philosopher can learn few things of more importance than the art of translating his doctrines into language intelligible and really instructive to the outside world. There was a period when real thinkers, such as Locke and Berkeley and Butler and Hume, tried to express themselves as pithily and pointedly as possible. They were, say some of their critics, very shallow; they were over-anxious to suit the taste of wits and the town; and in too much fear of the charge of pedantry. Well, if some of our profounder thinkers would try for once to pack all that they really have to say as closely as they can, instead of trying to play every conceivable change upon every thought that occurs to them, I fancy that they would be surprised both at the narrowness of the space which they would occupy and at the comparative greatness of the effect they would produce.

An Ethical Society should aim at supplying a meeting-place between the expert and specialist on one side, and, on the other, the men who have to apply ideas to the complex concretes of political and social activity. How far we can succeed in furthering that aim I need not attempt to say. But I will conclude by reverting to some thoughts at which I hinted at starting. You may think that I have hardly spoken in a very sanguine or optimistic tone. I have certainly admitted the existence of enormous difficulties and the probabilities of very imperfect success. I cannot think that the promised land of which we are taking a Pisgah sight is so near or the view so satisfactory as might be wished. A mirage like that which attended our predecessors may still be exercising illusions for us: and I anticipate less an immediate fruition, than a beginning of another long cycle of wanderings through a desert, let us hope rather more fertile than that which we have passed. If this be something of a confession you may easily explain it by personal considerations. In an old controversy which I was reading the other day, one of the disputants observed that his adversary held that the world was going from bad to worse. "I do not wonder at the opinion," he remarks; "for I am every day more tempted to embrace it myself, since every day I am leaving youth further behind." I am old enough to feel the force of that remark. Without admitting senility, I have lived long enough, that is, to know well that for me the brighter happiness is a thing of the past; that I have to look back even to realise what it means; and to feel that a sadder colouring is conferred upon the internal world by the eye "which hath kept watch o'er man's mortality". I have watched the brilliant promise of many contemporaries eclipsed by premature death; and have too often had to apply Newton's remark, "If that man had lived, we might have known something". Lights which once cheered me have gone out, and are going out all too rapidly; and, to say nothing of individuals, I have also lived long enough to watch the decay of once flourishing beliefs

I can remember, only too vividly, the confident hope with which many young men, whom I regarded as the destined leaders of progress, affirmed that the doctrines which they advocated were going forth conquering and to conquer; and though I may still think that those doctrines had a permanent value, and were far from deserving the reproaches now often levelled at them, I must admit that we greatly exaggerated our omniscience. I am often tempted, I confess, to draw the rather melancholy moral that some of my younger friends may be destined to disillusionment, and may be driven some thirty years hence to admit that their present confidence was a little in excess.

I admit all this: but I do not admit that my view could sanction despondency. I can see perhaps ground for foreboding which I should once have rejected. I can realise more distinctly, not only the amount of misery in the world, but the amount of misdirected energy, the dulness of the average intellect, and the vast deadweight of superstition and dread of the light with which all improvement must have to reckon. And yet I also feel that, if a complacent optimism be impossible, the world was never so full of interest. When we complain of the stress and strain and over-excitement of modern society we indicate, I think, a real evil; but we also tacitly admit that no one has any excuse for being dull. In every direction there is abundant opportunity for brave and thoughtful men to find the fullest occupation for whatever energy they may possess. There is work to be found everywhere in this sense, and none but the most torpid can find an excuse for joining the spiritually unemployed. The fields, surely, are white for the harvest, though there are weeds enough to be extirpated, and hard enough furrows to be ploughed. We know what has been done in the field of physical science. It has made the world infinite. The days of the old pagan, "suckled in some creed outworn," are regretted in Wordsworth's sonnet; for the old pagan held to the poetical view that a star was the chariot of a deity. The poor deity, however, had, in fact, a duty as monotonous as that of a driver in the Underground Railway. To us a star is a signal of a new world; it suggests universe beyond universe, sinking into the infinite abysses of space; we see worlds forming or decaying and raising at every moment problems of a strange fascination. The prosaic truth is really more poetical than the old figment of the childish imagination. The first great discovery of the real nature of the stars did, in fact, logically or not, break up more effectually than perhaps any other cause, the old narrow and stifling conception of the universe represented by Dante's superlative power; and made incredible the systems based on the conception that man can be the centre of all things and the universe created for the sake of this place. It is enough to point to the similar change due to modern theories of evolution. The impassable barriers of thought are broken down. Instead of the verbal explanation, which made every plant and animal an ultimate and inexplicable fact, we now see in each a movement in an indefinite series of complex processes, stretching back further than the eye can reach into the indefinite past. If we are sometimes stunned by the sense of inconceivable vastness, we feel, at least, that no intellectual conqueror need ever be affected by the old fear. For him there will always be fresh regions to conquer. Every discovery suggests new problems; and though knowledge may be simplified and codified, it will always supply a base for fresh explanations of the indefinite regions beyond. Can that which is true of the physical sciences be applied in any degree to the so-called moral sciences? To Bentham, I believe, is ascribed the wish that he could fall asleep and be waked at the end of successive centuries, to take note of the victories achieved in the intervals by his utilitarianism. Tennyson, in one of his youthful poems, played with the same thought. It would be pleasant, as the story of the sleeping beauty suggested, to rise every hundred years to mark the progress made in science and politics; and to see the "Titanic forces" that would come to the birth in divers climes and seasons; for we, he says—

> "For we are Ancients of the earth,
> And in the morning of the times."

Tennyson, if this expressed his serious belief, seemed to have lost his illusions; and it is probable enough that Bentham would have had some unpleasant surprises could his wish have been granted. It is more than a century since his doctrine was first revealed, and yet the world has not become converted; and some people doubt whether it ever will be. If, indeed, Bentham's speculations had been adopted; if we had all become convinced that morality means aiming at the greatest happiness of the greatest number; if we were agreed as to what is happiness, and what is the best way of promoting it, there would still have been a vast step to take, no less than to persuade people to desire to follow the lines of conduct which tend to minimise unhappiness. The mere intellectual conviction that this or that will be useful is quite a different thing from the desire. You no more teach men to be moral by giving them a sound ethical theory, than you teach them to be good shots by explaining the theory of projectiles. A religion implies a philosophy, but a philosophy is not by itself a religion. The demand that it should be is, I hold, founded upon a wrong view as to the relation between the abstract theory and the art of conduct. To convert the world you have not merely to prove your theories, but to stimulate the imagination, to discipline the passions, to provide modes of utterance for the emotions and symbols which may represent the fundamental beliefs—briefly, to do what is done by the founders of the great religions. To transmute speculation into action is a problem of tremendous difficulty, and I only glance in the briefest way at its nature. We, I take it, as members of Ethical Societies, have no claim to be, even in the humblest way, missionaries of a new religion: but are simply interested in doing what we can to discuss in a profitable way the truths which it ought to embody or reflect. But that is itself a work of no trifling importance; and we may imagine that a Bentham, refreshed by his century's slumber, and having dropped some of his little personal vanities, would on the whole be satisfied with what he saw. If Bacon could again come to life, he too would find that the methods which he contemplated and the doctrines which he preached were narrow and refutive; yet his prophecies of scientific growth have been more than realised by his successors modifying, in some ways rejecting, his principles. And so Bentham might hold to-day that, although his sacred formula was not so exhaustive or precise as he fancied, yet the conscious and deliberate pursuit of the happiness of mankind had taken a much more important place in the aspirations of the time. He would see that the vast changes which have taken place in society, vast beyond all previous conception, were bringing up ever new problems, requiring more elaborate methods, and more systematic reasoning. He would observe that many of the abuses which he denounced have disappeared, and that though progress does not take place along the precise lines which he laid down, there is both a clearer recognition of the great ends of conduct, and a general advance in the direction which he desired. That this can be carried on by promoting a free and full discussion of first principles; that the great social evils which still exist can be diminished; that the creed of the future, however dim its outlines may be to our perception, may be purified as much as possible from ancient prejudice and superstition, is our faith; and however little we can do to help in carrying out that process, we desire to do that little.

THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT DEFINED[1]

STANTON COIT

THE aims and principles of the Ethical Movement are so simple that any one, even if he have no philosophical education, may both understand and sit in judgment upon them. There is no need to speak in parables, or to use symbolic language; but there is need of explanation. People are so accustomed, when religion is spoken of, to look for mystical and transcendental ideas, which are remote from men's common every-day knowledge, that when the whole nature of the Ethical Movement has been set forth, they still look for something further. Its very simplicity makes them fail to comprehend it, or, if they do see, they fail to appreciate it. "Is that all?" they are apt to exclaim. But we count it no defect in the Ethical Movement that it is thus close to the working thoughts of every-day life. This simplicity is one reason for the hope that it will some day reorganise the spiritual life of nations. Let us now set forth the barest outlines of our position.

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[1] Delivered before the South Place Ethical Society.

The first of our principles is that the bond of religious union should be solely *devotion to the good* in the world. By "the good" is meant simply a certain quality of human character and conduct: the quality which we have in mind when we say that a judge is good, because he is impartial; that a father is good, because he looks out for the lasting welfare of his children; that a brother is good, because he causes his sister no pain if he can help it; that a citizen is good, because he is willing to sacrifice personal gain to the prosperity of the whole people. The desire to spread more and more this quality of conduct and character, and to root out badness from human life, is, we affirm, the true bond of religious union among men.

Nothing could be clearer and more definite than this doctrine; we aim at preaching it everywhere. We believe that by declaring devotion to the good in the world to be the bond, and the whole bond, of religious union, we shall ultimately induce men to remove all other qualifications for membership in Churches; and that men who are now outside of all religious fellowship, or who chafe under the dogmatic restraint of the Church, will immediately form themselves into societies for the spread of goodness; and that such fellowships will be the mother of thorough and permanent social reforms in politics, in education, and in family and industrial life. We believe that this idea of forming societies in devotion to good character and right conduct, stands equal in dignity and power with Christ's conception of a kingdom of God on earth, and that it comes to-day with all the freshness and vigour of a new social revelation—for which, however, the ages of Christian development have been preparing men's hearts and intellects. Not only is the idea clear and definite in itself, but when embodied in a society we have a social institution distinct from every other now existing. An Ethical Society, a fellowship solely in devotion to the good in the world, is different from every Christian Church, whether orthodox or unitarian; for the Church, besides devotion to the spread of goodness in the world, demands allegiance to a personal Creator of the universe. An Ethical Society, therefore, is unlike every Christian Church. Its basis in the first place is clearer and simpler; it is capable of being understood by the most ignorant man of ordinary intelligence. All men know, at least sufficiently well for a starting point, what goodness in human character is. But the idea of a personal Creator of the universe has baffled the speculative efforts of the best disciplined and most philosophic minds. In intelligibility, therefore, an Ethical Society may claim precedence over any Christian Church, and from this it follows that it is in its very nature more suited to men of average intelligence and of busy life. But it also differs from Christian Churches in being broader in its fellowship. It excludes no one because of scepticism as to the existence and personality of God or the divinity of Christ. But, on the other hand, let it be distinctly known that we are not, as a Society, agnostic. We do not deny the possibility of knowing the existence of God. We do not request or exact that a man shall first give up his belief in a personal God and in immortality before he shall become a member of our societies. We simply ask that he have a direct desire to plant good conduct and root out evil. As a Society we are not pledged to any theory as to the origin of the universe, or of conscience itself, or to any theory as to the limits of human knowledge. We are not an agnostic society; we have no theory at all, as a society, concerning the limits of knowledge; therefore the charge which has been made against us that we are agnostic is due to a misunderstanding.

When, on the other hand, it is brought as an objection against us that we have no theory which accounts for the moral enthusiasm which we possess and manifest, we point out the following distinction: *As a Society* we have no such theory, but *each individual member may entertain whatever theory appeals to his reason as true.* One may be a Theist, another a Materialist, another an Atheist. We simply maintain that no one shall make his theory a barrier between himself and his fellow-men.

We set righteousness up as an object to worship. But we recognise that it is purely an abstraction unless it exist in concrete acts and dispositions of the human will. We make no fetish of it; it does not exist except as someone is good; yet we can say that in our fellowship it takes the place which God or Christ holds in the prevalent view; but let no one overlook the supreme *rôle* which this self-same righteousness plays in the character of Christ and in the Christian idea of God; he who sets up God or Christ as an object of worship, thereby implicitly enthrones Righteousness. We make belief in it, whether there be a personal Creator of the universe or not and whether Christ be God or not, the bond of human fellowship and brotherhood. We urge that no one shall add the ideas of a personal God and immortality to the bond of religious union; that no one shall place any moral blame or stigma upon any other man for not holding them, by excluding him from Church membership.

But although thus different from all Christian Churches, it does not follow that we approach any nearer to non-Christian religious organisations, which have recently sprung up, than we do to the Christian

Churches. We are quite as distinct from Positivism, Secularism, and Socialism. But my reason for defining our movement off from kindred societies must not be misunderstood. My object is not to emphasise our differences. I would fain pass them over, except that an apology, defence, and justification, are rightfully demanded of any new movement. It has no right to come into existence if some other organisation is already doing essentially the same work and is based upon the same ideas.

The Positivists set up the worship of humanity, adoration of the great and good men of the past regarded as constituting an organic being, as the bond of religious fellowship. We do not condemn in itself the adoration of Humanity so long as it be not made the basis of union; but when set up as the foundation of a new Church we count it as unjust and unwise. It is unjust to every man who cannot naturally cast his motives for doing good chiefly into the form of gratitude for the good which he has received from humanity. Many a man has a feeling that, even if he had derived no good and perfect gifts from mankind, he should and would still serve his fellow-men; in short, the desire to do right is in many a heart deeper than the conscious, or even unconscious, debt of gratitude. We are, furthermore, distinguished from Positivists in not exacting special recognition of Auguste Comte and his services. We do not demand such homage because, as an historic fact, we have derived our chief inspiration from Immanuel Kant rather than from Auguste Comte. But it is contrary to the spirit of the ethical movement to exalt any one teacher or even all teachers. We exalt rather the indwelling ideal in each man. And, unlike the Positivists, we do not for a moment maintain that the basis of religious fellowship is the sum-total of all the positive sciences constituting the philosophic doctrine of the universe. We believe that science, except as an ideal of reason, becomes an unjust dogma the moment it is made the basis of a Church. The worship of Humanity and the doctrines of the various sciences are the Positivist bond, while ours is simply the furtherance of good character and right conduct.

Equally distinct are we also from the Secularists. They, as their very name implies, are reactionists against theology; whereas we demand simply that theology be not made the condition of spiritual union. Our rejection of it is not because we believe it inconsistent or fictitious or absurd from a scientific point of view; but because the reality and the validity of moral distinctions are independent of ideas about God, Heaven, and Hell. Though by scientific tests these ideas were proved to be true reflections of fact, still we should not introduce them into our bond of religious fellowship. Moreover, the Secularists, while affirming the dignity and worth of this world, and attempting to reconstruct society, have not laid down good character and right conduct as the starting-point and the final goal of all social reform ; in this we are more definite than they ; they are in danger of incoherence, now setting up political power and now industrial revolution as the true means of making society happy and just ; whereas we would start from the moral sentiment and recognise that all mechanical changes in institutions and the execution of better laws must be supported by and spring out of the moral consciousness of the community. Environment and law also affect character ; but the impetus towards the doing away with evil conditions of life must arise in men who are bound together for the spread of goodness in the world.

We are also distinguished from the Socialists. There can be no doubt that Socialists, like most other enthusiasts, have the good of the world at heart ; but, as the Church condemns anyone who does not believe in a personal God by excluding him from communion, so the Socialists, by the very fact that they name themselves Socialists, exclude all who do not believe in the transference of the ownership of land and capital from private citizens to the State. Whether this policy is in itself right or wrong, or is suitable for a socialistic society, is not a question on which we can join issue with them. We simply say that their doctrine of reform should not be the basis of spiritual unity among men. An Ethical Society would include both Socialists and Individualists, permitting each group to work in its own way for the elevation of society; but we would not allow either for the sake of their special remedy to break the bond of human brotherhood with those who differ from them.

The Ethical Society movement believes that it will draw to itself many men and women from all kinds of Christian Churches and from all non-Christian organisations. It believes, further, that its influence will affect even those who remain in the old fellowships until it transforms these into Ethical Societies; and, if devotion to the good in the world be the right bond of religious brotherhood, it would be strange if this movement of ours did not tend to conciliate all conflicting groups of earnest men. Thus, without swerving from the straight line of our conviction, we feel sure that we shall help to draw all men into moral union. We are not a new Church, as Churchmen themselves now define a Church, and we do not pretend to be; we have no desire to destroy the old Church; but we would vivify it, until it shall throw off all requirements both from preachers and lay members except the vital element of fellowship, devotion to the good in the world. Our first and main doctrine, then, is this which I have been stating. We would go about everywhere, but especially among the poor and the down-trodden, urging men into this broader communion, which we believe will prove the spiritual dynamic of the world, to raise it out of misery and moral evil.

Our second principle is that each man must bestow the highest reverence of his heart, the feeling of absolute sacredness and inviolability, upon the doing of every individual duty as it presents itself to him. In fervour of devotion, in the sense of absolute and supreme worth and dignity, each duty is to be done; and, so far as the feeling of inviolability has been an element in religion, we affirm that the doing of duty is a religion; with us every attack upon iniquity is a religious crusade. In this respect we are like the Salvation Army, which goes forth to fight sin. Every individual social reform which we take up must become to us, in sacredness at least, a religious task. For us goodness must exist in human hearts and institutions; and to bring it into existence is the highest that we know. We preach that right conduct is of supreme importance — more essential than doctrine or ritual; aye, the one thing needful in the worship of a personal God or of Christ in the heart.

We believe that right conduct is the way, and the only way, of a joyful, peaceful, inspiring life. We believe that it is the way to attain a state of perfect selflessness, which has no anxiety about the future either before or after death, which is willing to become annihilated at death, if such be the lot in store for us. Devotion to right conduct is, we believe, the way, and the only way, of deliverance from the haunting presence of our own former transgressions. Complete devotion to the right is the only act of atonement by which we can become reconciled with our past selves. Thus, right conduct, because it is the way of life to the individual and of gladness to society, is of supreme importance; every other attempt at self-reconciliation, or at attaining strength and self-confidence, is folly and evil. What food is to the hungry man, what water is to the parched lips, what the sun in springtime is to the trees and flowers, such is right conduct to the inner spiritual life of man. We preach this devotion to the good not only as the bond of fellowship, but as the way of inward peace and life.

Akin to this belief in the supreme importance of right conduct is our affirmation that this human life of ours—even though we have no outlook towards an immortal existence—still contains adequate motive, more than sufficient incentive, to work and to suffer for mankind, and to carry out the severest injunctions of duty. We maintain that, when once the soul realises even but faintly the depth and the height and the manifold meaning of the Good Will and the Right Life in man, the grandeur of the motive to be upright and just cannot be diminished one whit by omitting the ideas of personal immortality, and of a personal God. There are those who affirm that if these ideas be taken away, although morality would remain, nevertheless the motive to noble action would be deprived of its grandeur ; but in saying this they cast dishonour upon those very attributes of God and Heaven which are the glory of both ; they deny the inward pressure of the ideal of holiness within their own soul. And they belie their own heart's truth : their interpretation of themselves is more superficial than their own characters. We can only invite them to examine again more thoroughly their own moral experience ; they will find that the motive for right conduct which remains, after they have given up all interest in a personal Creator and in immortality, is still so sublime—nay, so overpowering, that there is no room left in human imagination for any additional incentive. If we fancy that there is, it is because we have not yet realised the significance of morality, in relation to our individual and social life here upon earth What we must do is to train our imagination and thought until we are able to comprehend better the beauty and social significance of a good life. Our doctrine is that the motive to right conduct, when its meaning for our earthly existence is fully appreciated, becomes practically infinite in majesty, and that anyone who affirms the contrary is false to the deeper inward experience.

Thus it comes about that when anyone asks us, "Why should I do right?"—as men sometimes do who think they need the hope of immortality to inspire them to duty—we may find it difficult to give an answer that will satisfy them. When a blind man asks us what we mean by the sun and the glory of its beams, we cannot tell him; and yet it is not because we do not know the sun and its light, but because the man is blind. We must remove the cataract and restore him to vision. And when a man deaf from his birth asks us what we mean by music and what feelings it stirs in us, we cannot tell. There is such a thing as a defect of moral perception. If a man is seeking for an adequate motive, there is a perversion of the moral nature implied in the question, "Why should I do right?" This moral abnormality becomes evident if we make the question more specific and ask, "Why should I care for and watch over my child? Why should I refrain from beating my wife? Why should I not murder my brother? Why should I not delight in cruelty towards animals and strangers?" When anyone asks us such questions, because he feels no motive, it is becoming in us to pity, and perhaps to condemn, if that will give him even an external motive, but it is out of place to argue or reason. If, however, the question, "Why should I do right?" means, "Give me the scientific reasons for the overpowering and sublime motive which I discover in my will and in my judgment!"—we may reason our best; but we shall never be able to give reasons so deep as the facts of conscience. Men have asked, "Why should a man suffer, and sacrifice even his life, if there be no Hereafter for him? Why should Jesus go to the cross, if that was to be the end of Jesus?" It is easy to tell why Jesus *would* go to the cross: he would because he loved his fellow-men, and saw that he could best serve them by dying for them. And it is also easy to tell a man who loves his fellow-man why Jesus *should* go to the cross: it is the same reason for which he did go. He ought to have gone because it would serve his fellow-men. If anyone asks, "Why should I love my fellow-men?" we must say: "Stop; this is sacrilege, if you imply that you do not recognise here a motive imperative and binding." If we are not diabolic and therefore by nature monstrously wicked or if we are not insane, we see and feel directly in our experience that love for mankind is inviolable ; it is final. Love knows no ulterior motive beyond itself, and will permit no doubt as to the fact that it is its own justification. Universal love is the essence of our moral personality ; its opposite, if it be deep-seated and systematic, is madness.

And yet let no one imagine that we are mere visionaries and weak-minded idealists as to the moral worth of man. Although we emphasise and believe in a direct appeal to the moral sentiments in him, nevertheless we recognise that belief in a personal God, and the hope of immortality, have helped to keep men up to the line of duty ; and if we had nothing to fall back upon but the direct love of righteousness, we should count our movement weak indeed. But we are aware that, besides love for mankind and conscience, there are many other motives to which we can appeal as supports to the moral life. These motives are lower, but nevertheless are necessary, and serve the cause of goodness. Besides the inward immediate reward to right action, we would set before men the four other sanctions: first, we know that, nine times out of ten, among the uneducated classes of society, wrong-doing is due to blind ignorance of the natural consequences of the wrong act upon the bodies and minds and fortunes of the doers. We would aim to remove this ignorance, and to bring home to men's imagination the evils to which they unwillingly and thoughtlessly expose themselves. These consequences, which we call the natural sanction of conduct, thus furnish us with a powerful appeal to enlightened self-interest. But to the natural may be added the legal motive, which is attached in society to the coarser forms of wrong-doing; and to both these the social incentive, the praise and blame of one's neighbours, may come in as a powerful supplement. The love of approbation and the fear of disgrace may be made a thousand-fold more effective than they are to-day. Besides this, we can develop sympathy, and thus bring to our aid the desire to avoid the giving of pain to others, and the desire to make others happy.

But to teach these aids to character and conduct is a subordinate part of our undertaking as an Ethical Movement.. Our chief means is to hold up directly the ideals of character and of a perfect society, we being sure that the human heart will recognise the moral ideal as its true home and will start forward to reach it. Preaching, however, if it be unaccompanied by the right life, is in so far impotent as a means of furthering the spread of goodness. We must attempt, so far as lies in our power, both to change the environment of men, so that it shall be more favourable to a truly human life, and to be ourselves approximately what we preach. The highest and most potent change we can bring about is to provide people with a fellowship in the moral life, by establishing Ethical Societies and by communicating the best of our own moral personality to them. But this change of spiritual environment must go side by side with efforts towards physical, economic, and intellectual reforms, which only the whole community can effect. We expect the members of our society, by helping in these reforms and by the general manner of their own lives both private and public, to do more for the community than the current morality of the day demands. We recognise that even stammering words, if hand in hand with work for mankind, are most eloquent preaching. Not every one that saith "Brother! brother!" will convert men to the worship of the Good and draw them into fellowship; but he who at the same time does the brotherly deed, he shall have power both by word and deed.

THE POSITION OF AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

J. H. MUIRHEAD

THREE statements at least are made or implied in the reports or manifestoes of all Societies for Ethical Culture, so far as I know. They are certainly implied in the last report of this Society.

1. Character and Conduct are the most important factors in life.

2. These are independent of a man's religious and theological beliefs.

3. Material resources, political changes, social institutions are valuable only so far as they contribute to the moral well-being of the community.

So far all seems plain, and he who runs may read. But when we look closer at these statements, and at the claims for support which an Ethical Society makes on the ground of them, it is neither so plain that they are entirely reasonable in themselves, nor that, even though they were, this would justify the existence of a new Society to enforce them. Are there not already societies covering all the ground that is claimed? Is there not the Church, which, with all its backslidings, has throughout, and perhaps now more clearly than ever, asserted the supremacy of individual righteousness? Is there not the Secularist Club and the Hall of Science, which for the last century have Sunday by Sunday proclaimed that morality is independent of "belief"? Finally, are there not socialistic and other societies innumerable strenuously advocating just those social and political changes which, when questioned, we admit are demanded in the interest of the moral well-being of the people?

Where, then, is there room for the Ethical Society? What ground can it claim to cover which is not already occupied? Do we really represent anything more than the discontent of a few finical persons with what other people are doing and saying?

The following lecture is an attempt to define more accurately the position of an Ethical Society by differentiating it from Church, Hall of Science, or Socialistic Associations. The Ethical Society is opposed to none of these wholly or in themselves; it joins hands with each at a certain point, but it occupies a place and holds a course which is different from all. In what follows I make no attempt at scientific accuracy of statement; I merely aim at a general description.

As in defining a geographical position we may do so either by its latitude and longitude, *i.e.*, scientifically by its relation to the earth as a whole, or by simply describing where it lies in reference to familiar places, so in describing an intellectual position we may aim at fixing conceptions in relation to the whole body of truth, which would be the more scientific, or we may content ourselves with defining its relation to current views and opinions, which is the simpler way, and more practicable in the present instance.

First, then, what is our attitude to the current view of science upon morality, and the basis of moral life? According to that view, morality is a "natural" evolution. It means, in the last resort, those modes of action which in a particular country and at a particular time have been found best to serve in promoting the survival of the nation or community. It is the mode in which the "tribal-self," to use Clifford's happy phrase, makes itself felt as a power controlling the individual will. Morality, indeed, is sacred; but neither in itself nor in its origin is there anything mysterious or supernatural about it. The claims of priests and Churches to be the depositories and administrators of a system of divinely-given commands are groundless. Goodness does not consist in obedience to the decrees of a supernatural Ruler of the world, but is the word for that conformity to social claims which nature imposes as the condition of the survival and well-being of a community. In other words, the moral law is the "law of nature," not the supernaturally revealed commandments of any deity. It is nature which announces it; it is nature which rewards with fulness of life the individual or the nation loyally accepting her commandments; it is nature which more surely than any deity avenges any outrage that is done upon them.

This view is becoming every day more familiar. What does the Ethical Society say to it? With certain reservations to be hereafter mentioned, the Ethical Society accepts it; it is opposed by its principles to any view which attempts to base morality upon supernatural laws and sanctions. And it is opposed to this whether it is held in the more naïve form of a revelation which happened at a particular time in a particular country, or in the more philosophical form of a divine enlightenment of the human conscience taking place at indefinite times and places. Views of this kind it holds not only to be irrelevant, but to be actually dangerous to morality, as they withdraw attention from its true sanctions and direct it to others the existence of which is becoming every day more and more problematic even to orthodox Christians themselves. The Ethical Society here joins hands with science in placing morality once for all on its true and indestructible basis. This is the chief claim which it puts forward as against the ecclesiastical teaching of the day. It does not claim to teach any higher morality than may be taught by the accredited oracles of moral instruction ; it does not profess to have new or startling views as to the true motives or the contents of the good life ; it claims merely to place these on a basis that is steadfast and secure.

But while the Ethical Society may here be said to rest its weight upon the teaching of science, yet there is a side on which it is in contact rather with the work of the Churches. The Ethical Society before which I speak disowns, indeed, in its report any attempt to found a new Church, yet it is clear that, in part at least, it aims at supplementing, if not supplanting, the authoritative teaching of the day. It addresses to the public lectures and compositions which bear a strong family resemblance to the traditional sermon. It organises practical work in school and guild. Its neighbours here and in America even form congregations and have settled lecturers. What, it is asked, does all this mean ?

It means that our aim is not theoretic alone, but also practical. We seek not merely to place morality upon an indestructible basis, but further to confound the sceptic by showing in practice the kind of moralising work which may be built upon the new foundation. For we do not forget that the " law of nature " on which we take our stand is a moral law. It is not the law of what we might call the body of nature. It is not the law of brute matter, like the law of gravity, nor the law of merely sensitive life, like the law of unconscious natural selection ; it is the law of spirit in nature, the law of progress and evolution, as intelligible to man. And the great difference between this law and that of the merely physical or animal is that, while the latter is obeyed without reasoning or emotion, the former must be understood and loved before it can be truly obeyed.

Hence it appears that by "nature" we mean not the primary and superficial aspect of human life, not what man is as an animal, but what he may come to be as man. Its law is imposed not by the impulses and desires which are the beginning of human life, but by the ideal which is the end. For the examination of nature opens to us not only a natural process of selection which brings us to the threshold of morality, but an ideal in the knowledge and love of which we find morality itself. This may be otherwise expressed by saying that history, properly understood, is the unfolding to man of a more perfect form of social and individual life in the effort to give effect to which lies his true happiness or "good." It is this good (which may be said indifferently to be natural, supernatural, or intranatural) with which the ethical lecture deals.

It is here that the Ethical Society joins hands rather with the Church than with Science. With the Church it appeals to the spirit of man, it proclaims and enforces a law that can be only spiritually discerned; with it it is opposed to all "materialism," to every form of "naturalism" or sensualism, to everything, in a word, which obscures or degrades the end which nature sets before us. With it it sets itself to present and illustrate both in theory and in practice the ideal of human conduct which is implied, but imperfectly understood and realised, in common morality. Hence it is of the essence of the Ethical position that those who hold it, while they think with sound science as to the nature and true sanctions of righteousness of life, work with the Churches in the effort to expound them and make them prevail.

A difficult question is here suggested, and has often been asked by members of the Society. What attitude ought we to assume towards the theism and Christianity of the day? On the one hand it has been demanded that we should be much more pointed in our rejection of what is commonly called religion. We should gain strength and clearness if we announced ourselves frankly, what it seems commonly to be supposed we are, atheists, secularists, and radicals in religion. On the other hand it has been urged upon us, by none more forcibly than by a former president of the Society, Professor J. R. Seeley, that we ought, before everything, to join hands with the Christian Church which he eloquently described as after all the greatest Ethical Society that the world has seen, or is likely to see. We shall then, it is said, speak to a larger public and gain by the extent of our influence what we lose by the comparative vagueness of our teaching.

In trying to sail between the Scylla of Secularism and the Charybdis of Orthodoxy I am aware that we run the risk of being misunderstood. But this ought not to deter us from trying to see things as they are in the matter of religion and theism. And to see them as they are in this case is to see that the word theism may be used in at least two very different senses. There is the theism which I have already alluded to in speaking of scientific as opposed to theological Ethics. It is that view which places God outside nature and human life. This theism differs from heathen polytheism in the purity and nobility of its conception of the divine nature, but it is essentially at one with it in placing the field of God's direct activity in a heaven more or less remote from human life. He is the Ruler and Governor rather than the principle and life of nature and man. He stands above the world as its Maker, perhaps its Saviour, certainly its Judge. Morality in the last resort rests on the sanction which attaches to it in virtue of man's personal immortality, and direct responsibility to a Heavenly Creator. Now, while acknowledging the many elements of truth in this conception, and especially the wealth of moral and religious feeling that has gathered round such expressions as "the love and fear of God," yet in so far as the theology that is usually attached to it is made the basis of morality, we wholly part company from it. For such a view resting as it does upon a belief in two separate worlds divided from one another, so far as we are concerned, by the bourne of death, we neither have nor can have any evidence.

On the other hand, there is a theism which is quite different from this both in its origin in reason and in its consequences in morality. It starts from no division of worlds and essences, but recognises in what we call nature or the world one onward-moving, self-differentiating, self-comprehending life. This I have already spoken of as the spirit of nature. It is something we did not make, but of which we have all received. In so far as we understand its meaning and enter into its purposes we obey its law, which is also our law—our morality. Now if this is what is meant by theism we should have no quarrel with it. To quarrel with it would be suicidal for us as a Society. It would be a self-exile from all that is greatest and best in the thought and feeling of the past. For it would cut us off from sympathy on their deeper side with Plato and Paul, Augustine and Dante, Spinoza, Kant, Goethe, and a host of more modern writers to whom this faith has been their highest inspiration.

I am painfully conscious how difficult it is to express this all-important distinction in a few sentences. Perhaps the difference between supramundane and intramundane theism and religion may best be brought out by my quoting examples of the faith and emotion which they severally embody. Of the first I take an example almost at random from a modern hymnal. In a well-known hymn the words occur:

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

. . . .

"Arm me with jealous care,
As in Thy sight to live,
And O, Thy servant, Lord, prepare
A strict account to give."

From theism or this complexion, I take it, we cannot be too explicit in dissociating ourselves. Of the other form of theism I might find many noble examples in Christian hymnals—if not in whole hymns, at least in individual verses. I choose rather an example from Pagan literature. In the hymn of Cleanthes, a Stoic of *circ.* 300 B.C., there is a noble prayer in which the four lines occur:

> "Lead Thou me, God, Law, Reason, Motion, Life,
> All names alike for Thee are vain and hollow;
> Lead me, for I will follow without strife,
> Or if I strive, still must I blindly follow."[1]

The theism or pantheism of which this verse gives the essence, with its faith in an invisible order, and a universal life pulsing in the human soul, I should regard as not only true but of the highest value as a support and inspiration in the moral life. To disown it is to cut ourselves off not only from the best in literature, but from the best in ourselves. To recognise and appropriate it may be especially difficult for us who have just succeeded in emancipating ourselves from an older form of religion. But just for that reason it may be all the more necessary. In a time of revolt against traditionalism there is a peculiar danger of being carried into an equally untenable neologism, and thus of committing the error which the Germans have expressed in homely phrase of throwing out the baby in emptying the bath.

The further question, "Are we Christians?" can only be answered by a like distinction in the senses in which the word may be used.

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[1] Translated by J. A. Symonds.

If, on the one hand, Christianity be taken, as it is by orthodox Christians, to mean the religion which makes Christ its object, we shall, as a Society, have little in common with it. Our concern is with conduct, not with worship, and however inseparable these are in popular thought, it is clear that they are separable in practice. We have to do with the character and conduct, not with the theological claims of the religious teacher, with the imitation of what is admirable, not with the belief in what is doubtful. In the present case we recollect that "it is easier to worship than to imitate Christ": we add that it is also less essential. Nor shall we be more inclined to profess and call ourselves Christians if Christianity be taken, as it is by some Unitarians, to mean merely the religion of Christ—the religion which Christ taught and practised. The form of religion which is usually identified with him, so far as it really supports the fabric of Christian theism which has been reared upon it, must be submitted with that theology to the tests suggested in the last paragraph.

Taking Christianity, then, in either of these senses, few of us probably should care to be classed as Christians. In this case, perhaps, we shall be less Christians than the least. But it may be taken in a quite different and much wider sense. It may be taken to mean those great constructive ideas that were first popularised in the sayings of Christ, were afterwards deepened and expanded by St. Paul and the author of the fourth Gospel, and finally made their way into the heart and thought of Europe, expressing themselves in the greatest forms of art the world has ever seen, throbbing in the great historic movements of the modern world—the Revival of Learning, the Protestant Reformation, and the French Revolution. If this is what is meant by Christianity we should surely claim to be Christians, and even to be more Christian than the most. For the contents of such a Christianity will be the characteristic contents of the modern spirit. They will be the faith in the growth of righteousness as of a living seed, and in the extension of human sympathy and fellowship as of an all-penetrating, all-transforming leaven, the faith in the fuller expression by the mind of man in his science, art, and literature of the meaning of the world, the faith in the ever-expanding capacity of the individual to enter by culture and civilisation into the free enjoyment of the hard-won possessions of humanity as into a kingdom which is his birthright. Whether the new world, which recognises these ideas as its watchwords, will still be content to speak of itself as Christian seems doubtful, so exclusively has the word been taken to denote quite a different set of notions. But if the name has to be given up we need not much regret it, so long as we keep the thing for which, though so little apprehended, it has really stood. The followers of Jesus were not called Christians at the beginning; perhaps they will not be so in the end.

A reference to one other question may help to define our position in relation to current thought. What is our attitude to Social Democracy? This is a test question in the eyes of many. By their answer to it societies and men are judged. And rightly, if by it is meant, Do you or do you not sympathise with the great movement for the betterment, by State and municipal action, of the position of the masses? Are you, or are you not, ready to spend your social advantages, your education and leisure, in promoting this end by the best means in your power? If, on the other hand, it is meant by the question that certain economic doctrines as to the ultimate rationale of interest, wages, capital, and the like, are necessary to intellectual and moral salvation, it may be well to recollect that there may be an economical as well as a theological dogmatism. On the theoretic side Socialists have done admirable work in applying the solvents of new ideas and methods to the dogmas of the older economy. But there is a danger of some of their own best ideas stiffening into rigid formulas when they are made, as at present, the common property of every platform orator. Practically, this distinction means that while it is true, in a sense, that "we are all Socialists nowadays," yet there are Socialists and Socialists. There are those to whom it is a theory of political economy. As we are not an economic society, we have nothing directly to do with these, except thankfully to acknowledge their admirable work and give our support to those practical measures which, we agree with them in thinking, will, on the whole, tend to raise the standard of comfort and morality among the poorer citizens. On the other hand, there are the socialists of the platform, often a very different class of people, and animated by a different spirit. They are sometimes doctrinaires, but more often they are men filled with a warm sympathy with the classes for whom they speak, and an equally warm antipathy to the class which they denounce. Among these the "capitalist" comes in for his full share of obloquy. Now, in connection with this kind of Socialism, which is so familiar that it does not require to be more fully particularised, the duty of the Society seems plain. It is just one of those cases mentioned above, in which, in the name of reason and justice, protest may be made against current modes of thinking. In the time of Plato, when Greek society was suffering from a species of individualism in many respects resembling our own, it was the habit of the platform orators to denounce the Sophists as the cause of the prevailing corruption in the State and in society. In a remarkable passage Plato gives voice to the higher reason, not in defending the Sophists, but in showing that the Sophists were not to blame so much as the public itself. The so-called Sophists merely reflect its prevailing ideas and desires, the real Sophist and corrupter being the people themselves, "when they meet together, and the world sits down at an assembly, or in a court of law, or a theatre, or a camp, or at some other place of resort." These things are an allegory, and apply *mutatis mutandis* to the individualism of the day. Our individualism lives most conspicuously, perhaps, in the capitalist, as Athenian individualism did in the Sophist, and by a like mental confusion the capitalist has come to be regarded as the cause of it and of the consequent corruption of the State. But as the Sophist was merely the outcome of his age, and merely reflected the prevailing sentiments of the people, in whom the fault lay, so the capitalist is merely an outgrowth of the time. He is the creation of Society (*i.e.*, of ourselves); to aim at abolishing him by any artificial means, as the reforming Athenians aimed at getting rid of the Sophists, is to cut off the head of the plant, and leave the roots and the soil as they were before. It is the sentiments of the people, their likes and dislikes, their habits of praise and blame, that have to be altered. Those who wish to go to the root of the matter will have their minds set upon this, and will not allow themselves to be diverted from it by the chance that may be offered them of making a scapegoat of any one section of the community, or wreaking a cheap vengeance upon classes or individuals. Now this is exactly what an Ethical Society sets itself to do in contrast to the advocates of particular reforms, and in opposition to the popular form of Socialism. Its field is education. It deals with that subsoil of social sentiment in which are the issues of life and death for any community. It aims, in so far as it has influence, in reforming that by permeating the educators with higher ideas as to the nature of the life for which they are training the new generation. To these ideas Socialistic writers have made most notable contributions in latter as well as in former days. They have done, and are doing, good service in the direction of removing economic hindrances to the realisation of such ideas in the lives of the citizens. So far we are wholly and heartily in agreement with them; but when they claim to have a monopoly of enlightenment on matters social and moral, or when they obscure the issues by leading a side attack upon particular classes, we must take our own way, even at the risk of being misunderstood by those with whom we otherwise agree.

How, it has been asked, ought the Ethical Society to give effect to its principles? What kind of teaching ought a Society which holds this position to aim at giving from its platform? Two views especially have been taken on this head and canvassed between persons otherwise agreed as to the work of the Society.

Thus it has been asked how far the teaching should be of an abstract and scientific character. How far ought it to be "doctrinal" in the sense of aiming at a systematic exposition of the ultimate basis of morality? In other words, How far ought it to aim at being a kind of popularised moral philosophy? It has been said by some that the "scientific basis," being the distinguishing mark of the Ethical Society, as compared with the Churches, ought to be the chief subject of lecture and discussion. The necessity for the existence of such societies, it is argued, has arisen out of the loosening in men's minds of the ordinary ideas as to the nature and basis of the moral life. What is wanted mainly is the re-establishment of the foundations of morality on a new basis. The details of the superstructure, the filling up of the contents of the moral life, may be left to other agencies, the school, the church, the social improvement, socialistic, or economic society. The chief thing for us is to look to the foundations; the building will take care of itself.

On the other hand, it is pointed out that abstract ideas have little or nothing to do with practical morality. A man was never made better by having a theory of metaphysics or moral philosophy in his head. The theory is much more likely to follow his character and prevailing desires than his character and desires to be influenced by his theory. Moreover, mere "ideas about morality," as they have been well called as opposed to moral ideas, are in a peculiar degree liable to distort and pervert our views of those simple everyday duties in the observance of which goodness for most of us consists. They are even apt, like "fine sentiments," to be mistaken for that of which they are but the ghostly shadow, viz., the concrete life of loyalty to what, apart from all theory, every unsophisticated mind knows to be demanded of him. The aim of the Ethical Society should therefore be to stimulate men and women to the discharge of the concrete duties of life rather than to expound the basis of duty in the abstract. So far as it aims at doctrine, as well as edification, it will endeavour rather to deepen and extend men's views of the obligations they implicitly admit than to theorise on the nature of obligation in general. Its function, in a word, is to appeal to conscience and reason as practical working forces, not to examine their nature as philosophical abstractions. To this end it will avoid anything that could be called a moral philosophy or a theory of Ethics. Its platform will be devoted to the thoughtful treatment of human life as a whole, as it is reflected in art, literature, politics, and philanthropy, in the hope that by so doing it will be helping to purify and expand the public view as to the moral capabilities, the rights, and also the duties of man.

Without presuming to assign so broad and hopeful a movement as the ethical its future lines, I may say that the fact that both of these views are held by people otherwise agreed as to the basis of the Society seems to show that it cannot afford to neglect either the one side or the other. As a matter of fact, the Ethical Society at the outset in 1886 viewed its work as concerned with the exposition of first principles rather than with the enforcement of the "middle axioms" of ordinary practice. Its first leaflet put this in the foreground, declaring the belief of the members of the Society that "there is at present great need for the exposition of the actual principles of social morality . . . and for the teaching of a reasoned-out doctrine on the whole subject." I am not aware that it has fallen away from this profession. Nor do I think it would be right in doing so. While quite admitting all that can be said on the dangers of abstract ethical discussion, we ought I think, to recollect two important facts in connection with our own time. The first is that, whether we like it or not, such discussion is in the air. It is in the scientific literature, the poems and novels, the periodicals, the sermons, even the daily papers of our time. The Ethical Society does well to hesitate to commit itself to the propagation of any form of Ethical theory or moral philosophy, yet it would be letting slip a valuable opportunity for usefulness if it did not set itself on occasions to dispute and correct one-sided popular ideas as to the nature and basis of morality. Such ideas—and this is the second fact I wish to emphasise—have a profound influence, in the case of certain types of minds, upon conduct and character. "Ideas," says Aristotle, "are a part of human life." There are people to whom such ideas as I am speaking of are more than a part, in that they are the formative principle of their lives and characters. It would be foolish then, and even culpable, for a society which professes to have a constructive aim to renounce the attempt when occasion offers to say a true and helping word on the great truths that lie at the bottom of morality and religion.

It has been said that a society whose position can only be defined by a series of wiredrawn distinctions, such as the above may appear to some to be, can never hope to become a power among the people. It may do well enough for intellectual persons, but has in it nothing that can attract the mass of mankind. The answer to this is simple and not far to seek. The Ethical Society, like older institutions with a like aim, appeals to people in two ways. It appeals to the intellect, but it also appeals to the heart. It appeals to some by its ideas, to others by its offer of sympathy and fellowship. It asks some to lead with it; others it asks to be led by it. The former are those who require and may justly expect a statement such as this lecture has tried to be. They are, as a rule, those whom the Church as a system of doctrine has failed to satisfy. It is their reason that has been outraged, and it is their reason, in the first instance, that must be satisfied. Others, again, are interested mainly in conduct. The Church has till now given them the support and guidance which they require in cultivating and purifying character. It has been to them a bond of perfectness, rather than a system of theology, and has drawn them to it by its offer of sympathy and companionship. Yet even to them the gulf which separates the intellectual and social aspirations of our time from the professed creeds and practised rituals of the Churches has become too apparent to permit them to remain longer in their old allegiance to ecclesiastical authority. And so it comes about that they find themselves without the accustomed props of their moral life. They are overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness and the apparent fruitlessness of individual effort. There is a danger of their throwing it up altogether, and so of falling out of the ranks of those who are pressing onwards and upwards. To offer an asylum or, at least, a helping hand to these, is surely a compassable end to those who understand the need. At any rate, it was in some degree to supply this want, to fill to some extent the vacancy thus caused in the lives of such as those whom I have just described, that the Ethical Society was formed. To these it would indeed be folly to offer fine distinctions and lists of formulated principles. They have had sufficient experience of the barrenness of these in the creeds and formulas of Churches. Nor do we make the mistake of supposing that they wish to become entangled again in that yoke of bondage. To them the Society holds out, not its ideas, but its organisation of workers, its sympathy, its help. It asks them to see in these an opportunity of recovering the sense of companionship which they have lost. It comes forward as a visible symbol to them and to all whom it may concern that others also with like aspirations as themselves, with like difficulties, and with like discontents, have found a common ground of work and hope.

THE END

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